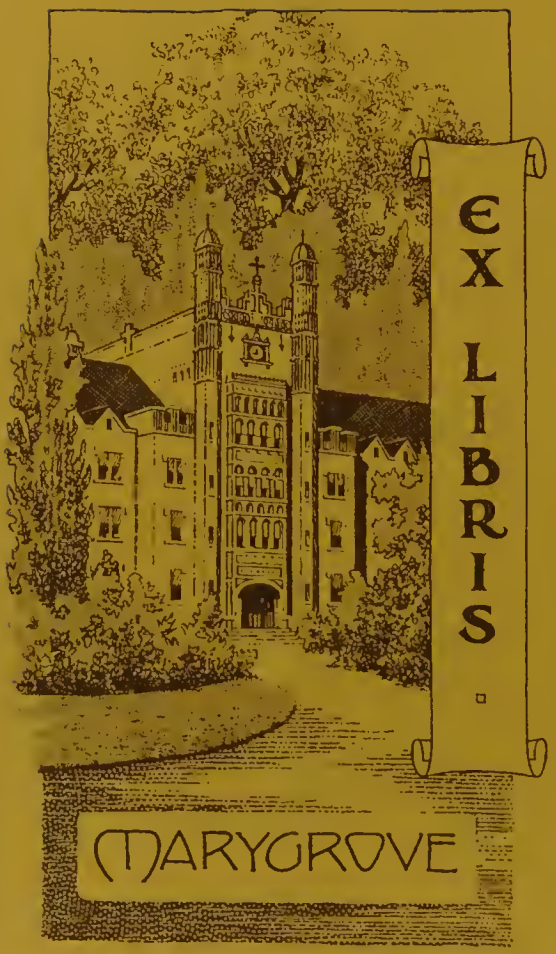
COLUMBUS

JACOB WASSERMANN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COLUMBUS

Don Quixote of the Seas

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

From the original painting by Sebastiano Del Piombo in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

COLUMBUS

Don Quixote of the Seas

BY JACOB WASSERMANN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY ERIC SUTTON

BOSTON . *Illustrated* . 1930

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

CHRISTOPH COLUMBUS: DER DON QUICHOTE DES OZEANS *first published in Germany in 1929.*

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Published March, 1930

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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From the original painting by Sebastiano Del Piombo in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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COLUMBUS

Don Quixote of the Seas

CHAPTER I

Intimations of the Unknown

The life and fortunes of Christopher Columbus are highly significant of the fact that even a man destined to great deeds can only be explained by reference to his age and his environment. Our imagination is far too prone to endow an immortal figure with attributes deduced from the results of his achievement and in no way connected with his earthly existence and personality. Fame is a highly mysterious process of crystallisation, in the course of which much dross is purged away. For that reason, contemporaries misinterpret such a phenomenon, or even fail to notice it at all; while posterity, by its knowledge of the ultimate results, now embedded in the course of history, can no longer form a fresh and vivid impression of these mighty figures. Thus all our judgments on historical epochs as well as on historic personages are like much-worn coins, whose value is only investigated for some special reason. Every tradition survives through the mass of errors that are bound up with it: it could not, indeed, be otherwise, since error is a creative element; it creates the hero and his legend, and invests him with a tradition that can

never die. Who could bear the truth, assuming that the truth exists? The truth would mean the destruction of every enthusiasm, every illusion, and every ideal that defeats reality. Such truth has little to do with research into documents and the ordinary practice of history—it is hidden like veins of gold in raw and rough material, and to dig it out and hammer it into significance calls for much toil, much devotion, and a certain courage; for the human soul, in which alone it is found, is a dark labyrinth peopled by terrifying ghosts.

A certain mystery—almost suspicion—hovers around the figure of Columbus from the very beginning. Everything is disputed—his character, his achievement, his development, the events of his life, and his origin. Seven towns in Genoese territory contend for the honour of having housed his cradle; Corsica and France have also made similar claims. It may be assumed with tolerable certainty that his father was a poor weaver, although he himself tried to suppress this fact. Such humble origin seemed to him a handicap, for in the days of his glory he used to talk of his noble ancestors. "I am not the first of my Family," he would assert, "who has sailed the seas as an Admiral." But the proof of this was sadly lacking. On this account some of his enemies called him a liar. Those who do so have little imagination, and a

sorry notion of this deep, almost unfathomable nature.

The course of his life bears much resemblance to a mediæval legend. Over a period of twenty years, with certain intervals, I have been engaged on the study of his history: and every time I took it up again I had to ask myself: Is this authentic? Is not this merely legend? Are not such and such events apocryphal, and these others no more than probable? He rose from nothing, a vagabond Italian adventurer, to become Grand Admiral of Spain, and Viceroy of a mighty Empire; he paid for seven years of glory and of power by sudden ruin and such humiliation as few men have known: and, after a feeble afterglow of fame, he died a lonely death, almost forgotten.

A strange destiny: and, to understand it, account must be taken of the strange state of the world at that time. This can only be done by clearing the inner vision of all preconceived notions, and all attempts to stamp a system on the past, which merely leads to the distortion of ideas and causalities. To keep a clear judgment, one should be like a man risen from the dead and look at the story against a background of the spiritual atmosphere and the ideas of the age, and, across the intervening abyss of time, bring these warring elements into unity. But, as our ambition may not rise so far,

we must content ourselves with less, and try to get as near to such an attitude as we can.

If, in these days, some reckless airman resolved to fly to Mars and actually set out: and if, on his way, he discovered a hitherto unknown planet and returned with his story of this new star—bringing news of unfamiliar beings, animals, and plants unknown before, that thrived in that strange air; of dimensions and proportions that made everything to which our eyes had been accustomed hitherto, seem dwarfish: this would about represent the revolution in the human imagination evoked by the discoveries of Columbus. For such, indeed, was its main effect: a revolution in the imagination.

A New World: now a geographical idea: to the man of the fifteenth century a blend of superstition and religion. Before the force of a magic, which for all he yet knew might be good or bad, the walls of his house had fallen,—the solid ancient house of Europe, which, after the vicissitudes of many centuries, he had succeeded in making tolerably habitable. Asia was already sinister enough: part of it he now possessed and knew, but at the end of his garden—as it were—lay a dreadful wilderness, full, too, of vague allurements: Africa, of which, from the earliest times, he only knew the northern edge, beyond those districts to which he had been able to give a name, was nothing but desolation and the

menace of darkness. The announcement of a new world shattered the structure of the old one. It brought a chill to men's hearts. The tales of endless unknown ocean which ships took months to cross without reaching its confines; nameless peoples that went naked and worshipped nameless gods; innumerable islands, immeasurable lands with barbarous kings and savage customs: if it was not all an hallucination, it was the omen of the long-prophesied destruction of the world. The fear that gripped the populations of Europe could only be removed by a desire that was equally intense. The word that delivered them from fear and drove them almost to frenzy was,—Gold.

It was certainly true that the faith in the hitherto accepted structure of the world had already been shaken. A foreboding of the event and a legendary tradition had already prepared the general consciousness for the discovery. The travels of brave missionaries and of venturous merchants, the enterprise of Italian and Portuguese seamen, had brought it into a dream-like proximity. Moreover, the far-reaching vision of certain explorers had smoothed the way for those whose mission it was to be to turn conjectures and assumptions into actual fact.

It seems more and more probable that the Egyptian saga of Atlantis, which appears even in Plato, was no mere fable, but rested on the dim recollection of a mighty earth-catastrophe. There is undoubt-

edly a generic memory that carries the impression of great events through successive millenniums, whence springs the power that enables those that have it slowly to enlarge, if not actually to fling open, the prison in which humanity lies bound.

In this way the Phœnician shipmen equipped themselves for the journey to *Ultima Thule*, which, whether they found it or not, finally became a mere symbol of the yearning that always beset them: so too, driven by some primitive instinct that would not let them rest, the Norsemen from Scandinavia in early historical times set sail for the coast of Newfoundland: and the Arabs, boldest seamen of the Middle Ages, searched the seas for new lands as far as the Azores and the Canaries. But upon the confines of these vast waters was chaos: no effort of the imagination could force its secret, and a sort of superstitious fear paralysed the purpose of the adventurers. Xerif al Edrizi, a Moorish writer, says very expressively: "This sea surrounds the furthest edges of the inhabited earth, and all beyond it is unknown. No one has ever been in a case to set down anything clearly upon the matter owing to the difficult and perilous voyage, the great darkness, the frequent storms, and the dangerous sea monsters. The waves, though they tower up as high as mountains, move without breaking, for, if they broke, no seamen could plough their way through them."

But the unknown was ever calling, and of those who answered that call thousands were engulfed in every century. Few of their names survive. In 1290 the brothers Vivaldi left Genoa Harbour in two galleys to sail around unknown Africa. They did not return. All the Latin peoples looked on the Italians as their teachers in matters of the sea: the Genoese Porsagno was a Portuguese admiral, the Venetian Cadomosto discovered Senegambia. In forgotten chronicles there is occasionally a reference to some such fabulous journey that excited the wonder and dread of the contemporary world: the indirect effects showed themselves, as previously in the case of the Crusades, in poetry and story, in which the motives, and indeed the whole plot, often turn upon these adventurous journeys.

Religious zeal was one motive; the commercial spirit was another. As the ocean was pathless and nautical craft had no scientific aids—the compass was unknown before the year 1200—the fearless pioneers forced their way through Syria and Asia to the farthest East of Asia. About 1250 the Dominican Aszelin and the Franciscan Piano Carpini made their way to the Orient as messengers of the Faith. Until the fall of the Mongolian Dynasty in the fifteenth century there was a regular connection between Genoese and Venetian trading houses and China. Some actually carried their business as far as the Moluccas, and their activities were, of course, of rather more practical a character than the

spread of the Christian Faith: they brought pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, and indigo—articles much sought after and highly valued, which the risks involved in securing them made very costly.

It was, indeed, a matter of profit, but not entirely of profit. There was a touch of romance behind it all. The age brought forth the type of the romantic Merchant and Trader, whose characteristic embodiment is Marco Polo. The fantastic description of his journey and his ten-year sojourn in the Empire of the Great Cham is one of the inalienable treasures of European literature. The book has, in its own fashion, exercised as deep an influence as the writings of Aristotle, or as Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso": it found its way among the lowest orders of society; wandering story-tellers carried a knowledge of it into the heart of Europe and as far as the Northern Sea, and for centuries afterwards its beneficent fictions called up strange and quite fantastic pictures of foreign lands in the minds of the simple children of the soil. History can produce but few spiritual events of this kind: Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" was one.

When the Polos returned from their second journey no one in Venice would acknowledge them. They were disfigured by their hardships, their clothes were torn and dirty, and their relatives refused to admit them to their own houses. Not until weeks had passed did they succeed in convinc-

ing their friends that they were what they had proclaimed themselves to be. To destroy every remaining suspicion, and at the same time to take a choice revenge, they prepared a feast to which they invited the most distinguished families in the city. The house was magnificently decorated, the tables were adorned with silver and gold plate, richly clothed attendants served the costliest food and the finest wines. The hosts at first appeared in long robes of crimson Atlas silk; then they went out and returned, to their guests' astonishment, in still more beautiful garments of crimson damask; these again they changed and reappeared in crimson velvet. Each time the garments laid aside were cut up and the stuff distributed among the servants. At the end of the evening the servants were sent out, and Marco fetched from the neighbouring room his shabby travelling clothes of coarse woollen material. When the ladies turned up their noses at these, Marco handed to one of them, who seemed least disgusted, a pair of scissors, and asked her to cut the broad sleeve, the dirty collar, and the patched girdle. When the others saw pearls and precious stones pouring out of the slits, they did not wait to be asked: not a seam was left intact, for they were allowed to keep what they could pick up. From that moment the Polos enjoyed the highest respect, and Marco, who knew how to talk with such incomparable eloquence about the palaces and treasures of the Great Cham, and in the process was

remarkably lavish of the word "million", was everywhere called Messer Millioni : the house in the Street of San Chrisostomo was called "Casa Millioni."

"Zipangu," he reports, "is a large island of the East and lies in the high seas, fifteen hundred miles from the coast of Mangi. The inhabitants are white, very handsome, and of distinguished demeanour. They worship idols and are ruled by their own king. They have gold in extreme abundance; it is to be found everywhere. The palace of the Prince is entirely roofed with gold plates, just as our houses are roofed with lead. The halls and rooms are lined with plates of gold and the windows have gold frames. There are pearls in great quantity and so many precious stones that you have only to bend down to pick them up, and the city of Quinsay, which means City of Heaven, is so called from its magnificence and has no equal in the world. In it are to be found delights of such a kind that a man may dream he is in Paradise. The women in all the streets are so tempting and have such experience in amorous intercourse that a man who has once enjoyed one of them can never forget her."

But Cambalu (apparently Peking), the residence of the Great Cham in the Province of Cathajo, made the deepest impression on him. The wonders of the garden and the twelve hundred marble bridges, the splendour of the Court, the immeasurable wealth of the Princes, the feasts, the processions, the beauty

of the landscape, tempt him into rapturous extravagance. It is all pure bombast, of course. But one may assume that he believed what he said for the very reason that he had not to fear any confrontation with the facts and with reality. As he possessed the confidence of his hearers and readers, he had long since ceased to lie when describing what he had not seen, but held fast to the fables with which he continued cheerfully to bemuse his mind. And his world felt not the smallest doubt about him. His account of his travels was considered unimpeachable as a work of geography and ethnography, the names of the empires and States which he had seen or of which he had heard, were entered on the maps in accordance with his directions, and it was through his information that they first acquired an existence in the consciousness of Europe. Two hundred years later this was the book to which Columbus constantly referred, and in it the strange Don-Quixotic error of his life had its origin; it was the revelation that pointed out his way as well as the scientific basis on which he relied.

But not on this alone. One of his chief witnesses was the so-called Sir John Mandeville, a mysterious personality; no one could tell whether it concealed a romancer, a rascal, or a man of learning. Yet he was taken no less seriously than Marco Polo when he told his fables of the Empire of Abtha and a province called Buonavison, where no man dared to

set foot because it was entirely covered with mist, and whence nothing could be heard but the constant neighing of horses and the crowing of cocks: of a vast sea of sand inhabited by fish: of the Dangerous Valley by the River Frison, full of demons and evil spirits: and of the Island Fracan, whose inhabitants live on the scent of wild apples. Polo's descriptions are paltry beside Mandeville's; the Great Cham, especially, becomes a figure in an Eastern fairy tale: three times a hundred thousand slaves serve the palace, ten thousand elephants and ten thousand eagles dwell in golden stalls and cages, and the author is so indecently lavish with his gold and precious stones that we positively reckon it to his credit when he talks of common things.

In this connection the question arises how far men of past ages are capable of grasping reality. This capacity was quite different in the fifteenth century from what it is now. There is now a fidelity to fact that was wanting in times of immaturity; the idea of truth was then as ill-defined as the obligation to truth was unrecognised. Between the object and the image of it there was still too much empty space which fancy filled with preconceived ideas, with the imaginings of fear, desire, and dream; it diminished but gradually with increasing knowledge and co-ordinated experience. Kepler's eye is no longer that of Ptolemy, and the eye of the modern bacteriologist is quite a differently constructed organ from that of the mediæval

alchemist. So long as Humanity craves miracles from Nature and from Life, because belief in God is involved in miracles, those who penetrate more deeply into unexplored existence feel themselves almost compelled to bring back reports of miracles, if only to establish their credit. And then, of course, miracles are ascribed to them, and the charlatan, unwittingly, becomes a wizard.

CHAPTER II

New Worlds

Certain admirers of Columbus allege that he studied at the University of Padua, and they have actually contrived to unearth the names of the professors whose classes he is supposed to have attended. There is no proof of this. Probably only the most elementary of educations fell to his lot, and, though he often quoted the classical authors both in his conversation and in his writings, it may be assumed that he had not read them in the original, and perhaps not read them at all, but merely heard them quoted; and what particularly struck him had impressed itself on his mind. Certain it is that from the very beginning his purpose was bent upon one object and one only, and with something like maniacal energy he made himself master of anything likely to serve that end.

The year of his birth is uncertain. He has not given it, and the evidence of others wavers between 1436 and 1446. He seems to have already gone to sea when he was only fourteen, but the events of his youth are shrouded in impenetrable darkness. He is so consistently silent upon the subject that one cannot help the conviction that he had some cogent

reasons for his silence. He must have wandered in many places, suffered much hardship, and struggled bitterly for his bread, for it is recorded that in his relatively young days he was already grey-haired. On one occasion he tells a story (not, incidentally, confirmed elsewhere) of the dawn of his career, according to which he undertook a voyage to Tunis in the service of King René of Naples, to cut out an enemy galley. He relates that the crew lost their nerve and insisted on turning back, and that he had pretended to consent, but had secretly altered the direction of the compass and thus deceived the men. At dawn they found themselves off the Cape of Cartagena while they all thought they were sailing to Marseilles.

Apart from the fact that there is no historical evidence for this adventure, the analogy with a similar act of deception during the first voyage to the West Indies betrays the fact that its characteristic features are drawn from a later experience. Whenever he makes any statement about his past, it is always with the purpose of creating a hero-myth. He never knew who he was; he only knew who he wanted to be.

Equally unsubstantiated is the voyage to Iceland and the Polar Sea, which he alleges he undertook, and actually made in the month of February in the year in question. His reports on the subject are scarcely credible, the geographical and climatic details are false when they are not plainly absurd, such as the

assertion that in those latitudes the tide rises six-and-twenty fathoms daily. It is not that he lies: ignorant, he sees it so, or rather he insists on seeing it so: every event and every experience is a romance —nothing remains within its natural limits and proportions; his mind is obsessed by immensity; all is catastrophic and excessive. One divines a man burning in the conviction of a mission, but knowing not as yet of his direction and seeing no path before him.

Having no definite purpose in his mind, he was not at this period concerned to collect scientific material, nor, indeed, was he in a position to do so. As appears from the evidence of his contemporaries, he was an amateur in seamanship, and his ignorance of geography excited the ridicule of the experts. It would be attractive to investigate when, and in what circumstances, the idea first came to the surface of his mind to reach the east coast of Asia by a direct route from the West (for this and no other was his purpose); but there is not a single indication on the point, and his leanings towards mysticism must have impelled him to do all he could to efface such traces.

Shortly before his death he wrote to the Spanish sovereigns: "For my voyage to the Indies I had no help from reason, mathematics, or maps of the world—it was but a fulfilment of what had been foretold by the Prophet Isaiah. Before the end of the world all prophecies must come to fulfilment,

the Gospel must be preached throughout the earth and the Holy City given back to the Church of Christ. God has chosen to work a mighty miracle through my discovery."

Surely we know these tones? Do they not recall Don Quixote proclaiming his vocation as the Pattern of Chivalry and the Saviour of Mankind? Indeed, his account of the preparations which he, as the chosen one, had to undergo, and the difficulties he met with in the course of it, is not without grandeur: "From my first youth onward, I was a seaman and have so continued until this day. It is the seaman who shall discover the secrets of the earth. Wherever on the earth a ship has been, I have been. I have spoken and treated with learned men, priests and laymen, Latin and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and with many men of other faiths. The Lord was well disposed to my desire, and He bestowed on me courage and understanding; knowledge of seafaring He gave me in abundance, of astrology as much as was needed, and of geometry and astronomy likewise. Further, He gave me joy and cunning in drawing maps and thereon cities, mountains, rivers, islands, and harbours, each one in its place. I have seen and truly I have studied, all books—cosmographies, histories, chronicles, and philosophies, and other arts, for which our Lord with provident hand unlocked my mind, sent me upon the sea, and gave me fire for the deed. Those who heard of my emprise called it foolish,

mocked me, and laughed. But who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost inspired me? " (He means: as he was finally successful, no one could possibly have any doubt on the point; previously to that he was regarded as mad.)

This conceals a noteworthy piece of autobiography. What pride, what steadfastness, how much bitterness in retrospect! How he breathes again at his success and what glowing consciousness of his achievement! He is like a man quite enveloped, as it were, by the conviction of his superhumanity. He makes himself small because he feels himself so mighty: when he conceives himself as the instrument of Godhead, he stands nearer to God than any other creature. He has that clenched-fisted humility which crushes everything on the pathway of renunciation that may hinder a man from fulfilling his own higher self.

He knew the cosmography of Pope Pius: the astronomical pamphlets of Regiomontanus: the writings of Abbot Waldfried von Rachenau: the " Imago Mundi " of Cardinal d'Ailly. He did not first become acquainted with them in his intercourse with the Prior of la Rabida and while preparing for his examination by the Spanish Junta, but certainly much earlier, on his far-flung travels, in all the Mediterranean ports, in conversation with cartographers, learned monks, ships' captains, merchants, astrologers, and dealers in manuscripts. In

a treatise ascribed to Aristotle, but in reality written by Posidonios, he had discovered that even in Antiquity the view was held that India could be reached in a few days from the west coast of Africa: in the mystical book that he wrote at the end of his life, he solemnly quotes a passage from Seneca's "Medea", to the effect that—"in after years a time will come when Ocean will break the bonds of created things, the mighty globe will be opened, and the sea-goddess will unveil new worlds." That meant more to him than a poetic vision, it was a prophetic voice; he listened and believed. But he weighs no opinion, he tests no evidence—everything that seems to serve his end and prove his mission he admits without discrimination and proclaims it as though it were a discovery of his own: in his eyes all have the same claim to authority—the enthusiast intoxicated by his own imaginings, and the impostor playing on the credulity of an ignorant public. If they feed his flaming hallucinations, he quotes the unscrupulous romancers and tellers of fairy tales with the same confident air as he does the evidence of Martin Behaim or Paolo Toscanelli. In that head chaos reigned,—a murk and confusion of the mind that no longer recognises any scale of thoughts and values, and, had it not been so; the tremendous deed could never have been accomplished. Knowledge begets cowardice; the will can only drive steadily onward in a half light.

The interest of the seafaring nations in the middle of the fifteenth century was exclusively directed to the circumnavigation of Africa. This continent was the mighty dam that held up their impulse to discovery. No vessel ventured far out into the ocean. From 1431 to 1453 the Portuguese, under the leadership of the marvellous Infante Don Enrico, established themselves firmly on the Gold and Pepper Coast, and the islands of Santa Maria, San Miguel, Terçeira, San Jorge, Fayal, and Graciosa became Portuguese colonies. The authority of Ptolemy was still unassailed: and he assumed that the continent extended southwards to the pole, and that there was no sea passage. Yet there were traditions that Eudoxus of Cyzicus had, in very early times, sailed from the Red Sea to Gibraltar, and that the Carthaginian Hanno had sailed with a fleet of sixty ships from Gibraltar to Arabia. Don Enrico decided to make an end of this uncertainty. He established a college of naval science and an observatory at Sagres, had all the maps revised, and introduced an improved compass on all ships, so that seamen could keep their course in the darkest night of storm, in tempest, and in fog. And so the captains adventured into the torrid zones hitherto held to be unnavigable, where the sea was said to bubble and boil with the heat, and lo!—they came back intact and unscorched from the equatorial regions.

The news of their voyages spread over the Medi-

terranean lands, and their populations, full of foreboding, listened and waited. Rumours were industriously circulated, fables old and new; and Christopher Columbus, conscious of his destiny, consumed by his ambition, was living unheeded in some seaport as a map-draughtsman or a pilot, greedily absorbing all the stories he could hear.

A sailor related that he had found a bit of wood on the open sea ornamented with beautiful carvings, the like of which had never been seen before. Another had fished up a stick of bamboo that could hold eight carafes of wine in the space between one knot and the next. The inhabitants of the Azores reported that enormous pine trunks of a strange kind had been thrown up by a storm on the beach at Fayal, and that one day two male corpses had been washed up on the island of Graciosa, whose face and forms bore no sort of resemblance to those of Christians (by which they meant Europeans). A sailor from Madeira had espied a mountainous land on the high sea far away in the west, and the people of the island of Gomara, who had seen it likewise, confirmed his veracity on oath.

Columbus, as he was a cartographer, knew the names of the legendary islands which, although their existence was not scientifically established, figured at that time in all the maps of the world, and even on Martin Behaim's globe: the Happy Isles, Brandan's Isle, the Isles of Antilia, Brazil, Satanshand, and of the Seven Cities. No one had set

foot on any one of them, their substance was wrought of legends and shipmen's fairy tales. The Irish Abbot Brandan set out to sea with his pupil, St. Malo, to seek for the isles of Paradise and convert the heathen there. After many wanderings he landed on the solitary island of Ima, whose inhabitants worshipped the mysterious ghost of a giant. St. Malo awakened the giant from a death sleep of a hundred years, and the demon expressed himself as ready to receive instruction from the holy man in the Christian faith. He was baptised and received the name Mildum. He told of another island, whose shores were surrounded by high walls of pure gold; and to transport the pious travellers thither, he threw himself into the sea and dragged the ship by a rope through the stormy waves. The island rose up out of the deep, but no sooner had they finished praying on the beach, than the foundations of the land began to quiver, they had to take to flight, and from the sea they observed that the island appeared to be sinking as though engulfed by some mighty fish. The giant, after his return to his native island, became so weary of prayer and fasting that he begged the missionaries to let him lie in his grave once more. In this case, the uneasy imagination of mediæval man is haunted by recollections of the ancient world and prehistoric monsters: for him the thought of solitude contains nothing of sublimity—merely horror and fear, which only the magical transforming touch of real-

ity can soften into something grandiose, or into a tale of mystery touched with humour. Recognisable threads of historical events are often worked into the trans-oceanic dream-tapestry, as in the legend of the Isle of the Seven Cities. After the conquest of Spain by the Moors, seven bishops with numerous members of their congregations, to escape the Saracens' swords, set sail on seven ships across the ocean to the West, and after dreadful storms, reached an island where they burnt the ships in order to force their fellow travellers to remain, and there, in the barren waste of the mighty sea, founded seven marvellous cities, on which no mortal eyes from the old lands had ever looked. But not a doubt was cast upon their existence, for just as no explorer of those days would have dared to question the reality of these fairy tales, they were, too, the inspiration and the goal of all these venturous nomads and conquistadors of the seas.

CHAPTER III

Struggles and Despair

It was not until after his arrival in Portugal that the life of Columbus gradually emerged from the sphere of conjecture and heroic legend into something like historical fact. Where he had been and what he had been before that time can no longer be established. The panegyrists of the great man have laboured as energetically as his enemies, both sides without result, and, by his own decision, previous to a certain point in his life, like Don Quixote, he had no antecedents.

The way in which he seems to have reached Portugal still reads like a romance. There was a sea fight with pirates; the galley caught fire and sank: he had to swim to the neighbouring coast, where he was rescued by some Genoese fellow countrymen. All this, though recorded by his son Hernando and corroborated and confirmed by his devoted admirer, Bishop Las Casas, is saga, invented out of regard for the heroic halo, and not a single detail of it will stand investigation. The truth, one suspects, was some plain incident of daily life.

Everything connected with his marriage seems just as stylised and worked up for poetic effect. A

harmless German compiler, who wrote a detailed account of the life of Columbus in the middle of the nineteenth century, states as follows (and the account given by Washington Irving and by many that went before and came after him is roughly the same):

"For a man like Columbus, Lisbon was the University that was to prepare him for his future passage through life. Here there was plenty of opportunity to get experience as a ship's captain, and to command or sail on ships to the Levant, the coast of Guinea, the Azores and the North Sea, but at the same time he found that, when he could get the chance of a quiet stay in a seaport, the best way to train himself for his profession was to become acquainted with the newest discoveries and perfect himself in the art of drawing maps. Meanwhile, however, this restless would-be sea-rover might have found it hard to get leisure for such quiet pursuits, had he not chosen Love for his pilot, who once—for the little heathen deity was prepared to venture anywhere—towed him in stormy weather into the Chapel of All Saints, where his heart, with all sails set, cast anchor. Here he saw Donna Filippa Muñiz de Perestrello, a noble Portuguese lady of surpassing beauty: he sought her nearer acquaintance, asked for her hand, and married her. She was the daughter of the dead Don Pietro di Perestrello, Governor of the island of Porto Santo, a fact which induced Columbus to make his

home on this island with his wife for a while, and study his father-in-law's literary remains, consisting of a mass of miscellaneous nautical notes and jottings: and there his son Diego was born. . . ."

An idyll in the true Biedermeier style. The God of Love, no—it is too affecting altogether. It cannot have been, nor was it, like this.

The man must have fallen deeper and deeper into misery of mind. Indeed, I fancy he lived in hell. He was already over forty and what had he achieved? For decades now he had been filled with a longing to excel, to leave the humble places to which an evil fate had condemned him, and follow his innermost vocation, the world's neglect of which was, as the years went by, torment unendurable. He was almost giving up hope. He heard of the successes of far younger captains; ships came home with stirring news: month by month the dark horizon that hung over Atlantis grew brighter and he, damned to idleness, stood in the shadow, powerless and poor.

I can see him, lying by the harbour at nights, staring with burning eyes at the masts and the stars. He wandered restlessly from town to town, he lurked secretly in sailors' taverns, to listen to returning travellers, and, sometimes, to ask newly joined seamen to get information for him. The hopelessness of his position must have driven him to the verge of crime. In later years he displayed a fervent, almost bigoted piety, and many thought

that it was done for show. I do not believe it was a mask, or a mere adaptation to Spanish ways of living: I am convinced that it was the natural and inevitable reverse of the contrary condition of mind —of denial, strife, and enmity to God—and was, indeed, the true tenour of his soul.

This Donna Filippa, as I see her, was a portionless lady of good family, maintained by her relations: What happens? She is glad when even a partially respectable man takes pity on her, even if he is without family and a vagrant foreigner: she will find him purchasers for his maps, smooth the way for him, protect him, and introduce him to influential persons. Thus a shaft of light broke into the dungeon of his nameless, deedless life. If one takes human existences and tests them against the sum of human experience, it becomes clear that progress is more commonly slow, imperceptible and gradual, than sudden, unexpected and dramatic. It is only from a distance that the dramas of history wear an air of conciseness; when looked at from near by they are seen to be a network of minute and almost indecipherable runes.

At the crisis of his agony, on the very edge of the abyss, Fate for the first time dealt a decisively favourable stroke, in enabling Columbus to enter into relations with the famous Florentine, Toscanelli, then already eighty years of age.

It must have been some inner constraint that caused him to pass over this man's name in silence

in all his later letters and papers. As he felt himself to be an instrument in the hand of a Higher Power, no suspicion must be allowed to arise that he had availed himself of any earthly help: it would have shattered, in himself above all, the mystical conviction of his vocation. The background of his character leads one to assume that he obstinately tried to stifle the recollection of the support, and even inspiration, given to him by a nature nobler than his own. What the world thought of this he cared but little. Gratitude is an element in a highly personal morality. Ingratitude does not always arise from coarseness of mind or from self-conceit; the ungrateful man is often a kind of moral sleepwalker who forgets the way he has come and the place whence he started.

One thing more. Columbus was certainly incapable of distinguishing in his own mind between the categories of thought and action, and feared to be held incapable of action if he did not claim the power of thought.

Toscanelli, an astronomer and geographer of distinction, had, by observation of the sun's altitude by means of an astrolabe (the instrument that then served as a quadrant), improved the maps of the sun and the moon in various respects and the estimates of the altitude of the pole, and had constructed a so-called gnomon in Florence. When Nicolo dei Conti returned in about 1450 from his journey to India and Java, and while he was seeking indulgence

from Pope Eugene IV, who was then living in Florence, for having gone over to Islam, when he had been shipwrecked and was threatened with death, his detailed reports to the learned Toscanelli induced the latter to the conclusion that Europe and Asia accounted for about two thirds of the earth's surface, so that the western route across the ocean to India could only amount to one hundred and thirty degrees. An error pregnant with results, which influenced Columbus' whole life, and the structure of his ideas. But for this error he would never have found the courage for his enterprise.

But Toscanelli was able to appeal to Marinus of Tyre, the forerunner of Ptolemy, and also borrowed from him the general features of a flat oblong map—a method of representation hitherto unknown which Martin Behaim used later for his globe. The map that he drew made a great deal of stir: in those days innovations of the kind aroused as much interest as a revolutionary chemical discovery to-day. Nothing was more natural than that the old scholar should send his work to that monarch who stood at the focus of all naval enterprise, whose ships had been for decades sailing the seas up to the dreadful confines that none had crossed — the King of Portugal. He addressed himself, as the custom was, to the king's confessor, and in a remarkable letter set forth the geographical situation as he understood it, and used the most pressing arguments in support of the sea route to

India. "You will observe," he wrote on June 24, 1474, "from my map that the distance from Lisbon to the city of Quinsay amounts to twenty-six '*espacios*'—i.e. three thousand nine hundred and thirty miles, and the distance from the Isle of Antilia to Zipangu (i.e. Japan) is fifteen hundred miles. I hope that the map will please His Majesty and I beg you to tell him, and that I am ready and willing to do him any service in the matter that he may command."

King Alfonso, whether because he was in need of money or whether his interests went in other directions, showed no inclination for the project, and the Florentine's letter lay a long while unheeded in the archives. Columbus, who had with difficulty made his way to Portugal before 1477, may have come to hear of it in some way. The passion of his life was well known—indeed how could he have concealed it from the world in which he lived: it was common knowledge that he was penned within his glowing dreams like a tiger in a cage, shaking despairingly at the bars: and some one no doubt said to him: "Toscanelli has revealed an important secret to the King, make sure and read his letter." And this then became his sole endeavour. Probably his wife got him into touch with people in Court circles by whose influence he succeeded in reading the Italian's monumental epistle, perhaps only in a copy. And what he read must have struck him with the force of lightning.

There is not the slightest doubt that this hour brought forth his fate. From that moment onwards he was able to formulate his purpose.

He took occasion to write to Toscanelli, in such terms as implied he knew nothing of the letter to the king, nor the map that the Florentine had sent to the king's confessor. Toscanelli answered with great alacrity, sent a new map, accompanied by exact information, and concluded with the words:

"Be assured that you will find mighty kingdoms, and bring joy to the Princes that rule in them, if you open a way for them to become acquainted with Christianity and instructed in our religion and all our sciences."

Columbus was very susceptible to every sort of prophecy; he shut this deep into his heart and made it an article of faith. The encouragement of such a man made him feel as though he had been dubbed a knight, and now all depended on gaining the ear of the king. It was King John before whom he laid his schemes; Alfonso had died in 1481. What material, information, and arguments he had collected for the purpose, no doubt with infinite labour, we cannot now say, with the sole exception of the fact that he carefully avoided any reference to Toscanelli. He brought forward all the authorities he could quote in support of himself—poets, philosophers, astrologers, the Prophets, but here, as later on in Spain, he never uttered Toscanelli's name, although it would have seemed only too

natural to show his reverence for the celebrated man, and in so doing gain credence for himself.

Which is strange. Moreover, it is quite certain that upon the occasion of the first journey, he had Toscanelli's map on board, and set his direction by it. If it was not evil conscience that moved him to this felony, it was perhaps fear of this kindred spirit that at the outset, when his hopes seemed like fulfilment, took possession of his dark and haunted soul. Toscanelli had set his mind ablaze, but another might equally have caught the inspiration and reach the goal before him. And if he, Columbus, was not the first, he was a lost and ruined man.

The whole story of the letter has, from the very beginning, caused something like a panic among the uncompromising admirers of Columbus. To clear him from the charges of dishonesty and disingenuousness, dates have been shifted, documents have been glossed over or deliberately misinterpreted, and evidence suppressed: all this to make it appear that he applied to Toscanelli on his own initiative, and had not first obtained a sight of the year-old letter to Alfonso by underhand and devious means. There is pretty well indisputable evidence to show that his letter to the Florentine could scarcely have been composed before the year 1479: and even this is to credit him with a great deal of patience for, as King Alfonso had refused Toscanelli's proposal, and a second attempt had proved fruitless, it was more than two years until

his prospects improved through Alfonso's death. In the meantime he is supposed to have placed his projects before the governments of France and England and the Council of Genoa, only to be everywhere put off or refused.

All this may be ignored. There is no need to vindicate Columbus' honour, palliate his faults, or paint him in glowing colours. We are not to set up a statue on a pedestal but to portray a man, whose peculiar greatness, darkened though it be by shadows, may first be discerned behind the traditional story. All these moral controversies and historical uncertainties belong to the chapter "Nebulosa de Colón", which a modern Spanish author has set forth with such a wealth of material. If the efforts of the Church to dispel this mist, in order to enthrone a new saint, had even remotely succeeded, his figure would thereby have lost its tragic splendour and its enthralling mystery.

With the day on which King John accorded him audience, Columbus enters into the full light of history.

He promised the golden mountains in the literal sense of the words. He promised Paradise, and he did not speak in metaphor, for he meant to set sail in search of it. He appears before us as a man of amazing eloquence, and, although indeed this gift was innate in him, what must have been the fever-

ish, splendid vehemence of his speech when it was first given to him to speak, in such an exalted place, of his purpose and his mission, and everything depended on the sovereign's Yes or No!

The king wavered. He had the proposal examined by his counsellors: and they pronounced Columbus to be a brainless babbler, whose fantastic stories of the Isle of Zipangu were quite undeserving of belief. If the monarch had still any inclination to let himself be drawn into any further negotiations, he must needs have been scared by the man's utterly extravagant demands. He maintained the same demands, with positively brazen obstinacy, later on in the face of the Spanish royal pair, without realising that they stamped him as a madman in the eyes of every reasonable and right-thinking person.

According to a doubtful tradition, King John, under cover of secrecy, fitted out a ship, provided it with Genoese plans and maps, and sent it out on a voyage of discovery, on the pretext of sending supplies to the Cape de Verde Islands. But, so it is alleged, the captain returned without having accomplished his object, reporting that hurricanes and stormy weather had made the journey impossible. This faithless treatment forced Columbus to leave the Portuguese Court and fly to Spain.

The affair was not so simple as this. It is quite certain that Columbus was deeply disappointed, and fled, but his motives are obscure. It would appear

that he came into conflict with the legal authorities. Certain indications (in a subsequent letter of the king) suggest that he was threatened with imprisonment for debt, if nothing worse. It must not be forgotten that he was a humble hanger-on of the Court and perhaps not even that—a man who wandered about with petitions in his pockets, a haunter of antechambers, a man of many schemes. Such persons are instinctively mistrusted and are continually in danger of paying for their failings as though they had been crimes: and, in addition to this, few people can be found to take them seriously.

He took his young son Diego with him on his journey; his wife and younger children stayed behind in Portugal, presumably in poverty and misery. Certain moralising biographers, concerned lest this heartlessness might throw too unpleasant a light upon their hero, maintain that Donna Filippa was already dead, and that he wanted to take the eldest child to a relation at Huelva in Spain. But I cannot bring myself to believe that in this dark moment of his life any considerations of sentiment could have prevented him leaving a country where he could expect no more help. The kernel of his being was restlessness. He was always on the move until his death. He wandered unceasingly from country to country, and sailed from sea to sea, one of the most tormented figures that history has ever known.

It is extraordinarily striking to observe, from the

detached point of view which the long-completed cycle of events enables us to take, how a great man's star draws him, as though by a never-failing magnetic force, to his appointed end: whatever he does or whatever he fails to do, every error, every neglect, every apparent defeat even, does actually and inevitably bring him nearer to the hour of fulfilment.

The beggar who in a state of exhaustion prayed for bread and water at the gate of the Franciscan cloister of La Rábida saw himself at the end of his hopes. He was no longer young, probably near the end of the forties at least, his hair completely grey, his face lined; he had grown acquainted with so much humiliation and bitterness, and done so much fruitless work, squandered so much enthusiasm, experienced so much contempt and rejection, that it seemed to him enough to lie down and die.

This lowest point on the curve of his life is the beginning of the ascent. To make this possible, Providence had placed two exceptional men in this remote convent. One was the Reverend Prior Juan Perez, who had once served in the Treasury, and been the queen's confessor; he was weary of worldly glory, and had devoted himself to pious practices and learned pursuits in the seclusion of his cell. The other was the monk Antonio de Marchena, a peaceful dreamer, much given to cosmographical studies, and with astrology, which was his special interest.

The face, so full of spiritual torment, the tall gaunt form, the pitiful aspect, and the unfamiliar dialect of this beggar at the gate, struck them all. They asked him who he was. He replied: "I am called Christobal Colón. I am a sea captain from Genoa, and I must beg my bread because Kings will not accept the Empires that I offer them."

A marvellously Don-Quixotic speech—incomparably well-invented words—if they are invented. Posterity goes on telling stories about her Immortals, depicting them as perfect embodiments of the Idea that they perhaps never fully expressed on their passage through life.

Enquiries had to be made into so remarkable a personage. He was promised hospitality. He astonished every one by his knowledge, his profound speculations, his tales of strange experiences, his lofty bearing, and his unshakeable faith in himself. Night after night these discussions went on until morning. Columbus explained on his maps the course he intended to take; his arguments were full of force and his eloquence irresistible. He did not conceal the fact that after his flight from Portugal he had, as he had done before, again offered his services to England and France through the agency of his brother Bartholomé: the prior, all fire and flame, asserted that so far-reaching a project must not be withheld from the Spanish Government. Experts were summoned from the neighbouring port of Palos, and among them was Alonzo Pinzon

who later commanded one of the three caravels on Columbus' first voyage, and was the most gifted and spirited personality among the seamen of the time. The plan was endorsed by these experienced men, who considered it perfectly capable of fulfilment: the prior encouraged Columbus to travel to the Court at Cordova, and gave him a warm letter of recommendation to the all-powerful Hernando de Talavera, then confessor to Queen Isabella.

Columbus, unshakeably sanguine, like all knights-errant, saw as already accomplished what was as yet but in embryo, and repaired in high spirits to Cordova.

Once more the time proved unfavourable. Ferdinand and Isabella were waging war against the Moors. The State Treasuries were empty, the royal pair were hard pressed and took little interest in the fantastic proposals of an unknown man: Talavera did not conceal his scepticism, the Archbishop of Toledo, of whom he obtained an audience, would not give him any definite answer, and the wealthy Duke of Medina-Celi, who had a weakness for seafaring adventurers, was grudging, cautious, and capricious. The mean appearance which Columbus presented at the Court did not increase the estimation in which he was held. He was sent from one great man to another, from antechamber to antechamber; he followed the Court to Salamanca, tried to get every one to take up his ideas, and met with nothing but fair words, smiles, and ridicule:

at last after the most urgent efforts he succeeded in obtaining audience of the queen. He owed his success to the intercession of the sternly orthodox Archbishop of Toledo, the Grand Cardinal of Spain, who after the most anxious enquiries had reached the conclusion that the proposals of the Genoese contained nothing contrary to Holy Writ, indeed he could explicitly and confidently appeal to the words of the Prophet, saying: "The ends of the Earth shall be brought together and all peoples, tongues, and languages united under the banner of the Saviour."

The queen, who was dependent on the dignitaries of the Church for her opinions, listened to the petitioner, hesitated, did not really understand him, but at the same time could not resist the strange impression made upon her by this disturbing, eloquent man, in whose heart burned so fierce a flame. Probably, also, he touched her feminine sympathy. She was a good-hearted woman in spite of all her coarse-grained religious zeal. In almost every one of Columbus' later letters to her there is an undercurrent of expression more suited to the woman than the queen, which must have so touched her that she protected him against his ever-assiduous enemies, and treated his follies with indulgence. He won her confidence by his expressive, highly Spanish piety, and as she was a born ruler she felt instinctively the fateful will power in the man, and knew that his promises were no empty bluster.

She decided that a Junta should consider his theories and assertions, and pronounce judgment on them, and to relieve his immediate necessities she granted him a small allowance until his affair was decided. In this way he could at least regard himself as in the service of the Crown and would be entitled to use this position in pressing his claims.

Yet there still stood before him years of torturing delay, of vain struggles against Court intrigues and ecclesiastical prejudice, and certain indications in his letters as well as the whole composition of his character make it clear that it was during this period that the balance of his soul was most grievously endangered by despair.

CHAPTER IV

Tried and Found Wanting: A Suppliant: A Wanderer: Insensate Claims

As directed, the Junta assembled, and the place of its meeting was the Dominican Monastery of San Estéban in Salamanca, in which Columbus had been assigned a lodging. It was the turn of the years 1486–1487. Colón was summoned to set forth and explain his proposals and the contemporary documents leave no doubt as to the result. The learned dignitaries, with the exception of Fray Diego de Deza, Professor of Theology, were utterly sceptical and adverse.

Religion and learning were at that time in Spain identical disciplines. The Inquisition was at the height of its power, and every opinion suspected to be heretical involved its holder in bloody consequences. That the sacred tribunal was prejudiced in this inquiry is abundantly clear from its attitude and spirit: Columbus appeared to them not as one commissioned by the Crown, but as a delinquent, whose errors and transgressions were to be judged. In any event he passed as an adventurer; at the very least, he was regarded as a deceiver of the people,

and from the beginning he had to entrench himself in a hostile position.

The vital objection was this: When profound philosophers had made the conformation of the world the subject of their enquiries, and skilful seamen had for thousands of years produced trustworthy evidence on the matter, it was something more than presumption for a common man to maintain that so great discovery as he promised had been reserved for him alone. He had against him the Psalms of David, the views of St. Chrysostom, St. Hieronymus, St. Gregory, St. Basil, and St. Ambrose. In particular there was a passage from St. Lactantius that he would find it hard to meet. "Is there anyone anywhere so foolish as to think there are Antipodeans—men who stand with their feet opposite to ours, men with their legs in the air and their heads hanging down? Can there be a place on earth where things are upside down, where the trees grow downwards, and the rain, hail, and snow fall upward? The mad idea that the earth is round is the cause of the imbecile legend of the Antipodeans with their feet in the air, and such people proceed, in their foolishness, from error to error, and so one leads to another."

Moreover St. Augustine states that the theory of the Antipodes is not consistent with the True Faith: whosoever presumes that there are inhabited lands on the other side of the globe denies the descent of these peoples from Adam, since it is impossible that

they could have crossed the world-sea : thus it conflicts with the fundamental truth of the Bible that all men are descended from one original pair of progenitors. And is it not said in the Psalms that the sky is spread out like a hide? This must surely mean that it is the covering of a tent, which among the old shepherd peoples was made from the skins of beasts. In the same way St. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews called the heavens a tabernacle spread over the earth, which clearly indicates that the sky must be flat over its whole extent.

Certain of the more liberal members of the Council did not deny that the earth was a globe, and even admitted the existence of Antipodeans, but they considered it impossible to reach them, as in the tropics the sea was actually boiling with the heat. Moreover, on the authority of Epicurus, if the earth is a globe, it is only inhabitable and covered by the sky on the northern half: on the other is chaos, the abyss, an unending waste of waters. Assuming that India could be reached by sea, how could a return be managed, since though it is possible to travel down the surface of the globe, it is not possible to travel up it? And had not Seneca, the orator, put forward the question in his *Suasoriæ?* Would Alexander embark on the ocean, having regard to the fact that India is the outermost land in the world and that beyond it is eternal night? And he himself answers, No: Alexander would not embark in search of a new world : why

then should a man of to-day make so terrible a venture, who had neither Alexander's godlike powers, nor his royal resources?

Strange conflict! How should Columbus ward off this storm of academic discussion and cross-examination, when in all his views and ideas he stood on the same ground as his inquisitors and had nothing to advance in opposition to them but an inner image that he could not make them see, and his own rocklike conviction. He had to try—and his oratorical talent made it not so difficult—to beat them with their own weapons: any attempt to use a scientific argument, even if he had really known how to do so, would have been fatal.

In the year of his success he wrote on one occasion to King Ferdinand: "I came to your Majesty as the Emissary of the Holy Trinity, to spread the Holy Faith, for God speaks clearly enough about these lands through the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah, where it is said that His Name shall be proclaimed abroad from Spain." In the same way, before that pious assemblage in San Estéban, he insisted that he must be regarded as one inspired. The passages in Isaiah that he forcibly interpreted to his own ends are to be found in the twenty-fourth and sixty-fourth chapters. "From the uttermost part of the earth we have heard songs," and: "I will build a new heaven and a new earth." The suggestion that this mission was reserved for the King of Spain is the egregious assumption of a

monomaniac, completely enslaved to words: and a no less arbitrary glorification of the marvel of his position as a chosen instrument is his quotation of the mysterious words from the Book of Job: "Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure."

With such sacred words as these, words that well up from the deepest springs of humanity, he managed to pacify the Assembly that was besetting him so relentlessly. It was seen that he had authorities on his side, he unrolled great parchments and read aloud in a majestic voice. The forebears of humanity and the patriarchs had spoken for him. There were his maps, and there was his course of his journey already marked out: but in order not to make a premature disclosure of his projected voyage, and thus be robbed of the fruits of his life's work (he had become more astute since King John's attempt at betrayal), he confined himself to vague indications which perhaps made the monks, prelates, abbots, bishops, and archbishops more favourable than a clear exposition and references to a scholar like Toscanelli would have done (here again, as I

have already mentioned, he omitted all reference to Toscanelli). They could not refuse to hear him and argue with him: but what created the most powerful effect was his assurance: the demeanour of an unshakeable fanatic, and his visionary eyes, which could already see lands and empires whose mere existence was a matter for debate.

The judgment of the Junta was adverse. Colón went to the queen and said: "The Tribunal is robbing you of glory, honour, and riches." The queen wanted to be quite certain, and handed over the project for subsequent examination by the Council of State. The Council's verdict was that the views of the Genoese stranger could not possibly be correct; he must be the victim of delusions. The developments in the military situation prevented the queen from attending to her protégé during the next few months, but she had small sums of money sent to him from time to time, so that he could join the Court at Malaga. The city was taken and the great mosque was consecrated as a cathedral. In August, 1487, owing to the overcrowded condition of the place, or the careless disposal of the dead, the plague broke out, and the Court hurried to Cordova, then for the winter to Saragossa, then in spring to Murcia, and in the autumn to Valladolid. In a state of intolerable suspense and anxious bewilderment Columbus followed the queen from city to city, from camp to camp, from Valladolid to Medina del Campo, and

from there again to Cordova. He composed petition after petition, bestirred himself to gain audiences with dukes, bishops, knights of various orders, princes, and princesses: sometimes he obtained goodwill and support, as, for example, from the Duke of Medina Sidonia, but for the most part he was put off, and not seldom dismissed with contempt, sometimes as a mere buffoon, sometimes as a tiresome beggar of favours, sometimes as a wandering astrologer, and occasionally even as a foreign spy.

In May of 1487 he received a subsistence allowance of three thousand *maravedis* (about two hundred and forty marks of to-day's money), in July another three thousand, in August four thousand, in October four thousand. With this he could actually meet his necessities. Little as it was, it still proved, in spite of the double refusal that his project had met with at the hands of the Junta and the Council, that the queen could not make up her mind to abandon him.

There is still in existence a royal order, a letter, in the form of a free pass, addressed to the mayors, magistrates, *regidors*, and all manner of officials, requesting them to provide Christobal Colón, whatever city, town, or village he might enter, with good free quarters: only the cost of his board might be reckoned at the current rates. For he was travelling upon important matters affecting the king's service, both to the Court and to other parts of the kingdom.

It is said that he not merely shared with his queen the dangers and privations of the campaign, but also on various occasions displayed great bravery, as for instance at the siege of Baza, where the queen's presence inflamed her knights to the most brilliant deeds, and Muley Boabdil, King of Granada, had to sue for peace. It was a cunning political move on the part of the Moorish sovereign to get the Sultan of Egypt to send a delegation of Jerusalem monks to the queen, to announce that the Holy Sepulchre would be destroyed and all Christians in Syria and Palestine would be massacred, if she did not keep her hands off Granada. Isabella, in a dreadful conflict of mind, did not yield to the threat; she sent the monks away with the promise that she would send the Order a thousand ducats yearly for the maintenance of the tomb of Christ, and as an oblation for the sacred site she gave them a veil which she had woven with her own hands.

It is reported that Columbus was present at this scene, and that it made so deep an impression upon him that he made a vow that he would devote all the treasures that he was to bring back from India in fitting out a crusade to Syria for the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre. Thus, in the best manner of Don Quixote, he displayed the utmost generosity with wealth which was as yet outside his reach, and upon which he had not the smallest prospect of ever laying hands.

With the royal pass in his pocket he wandered about Spain, probably from tavern to tavern and castle to castle, trying to get supporters and followers, to create an atmosphere of confidence, to raise money for the equipment of a fleet, composing despatches, drawing map after map, looking anxiously for news from the seat of war: for victory or defeat, as had often been the case, meant defeat or victory for his own schemes.

In the course of these restless and purposeless wanderings all manner of dubious and troublesome folk fastened themselves to his heels—adventurers, deserters, wrecked sailors, discontented people from all walks of life, small ruined hidalgos, escaped monks, professional parasites, flatterers who fed and fostered his feeling of neglect and vocation while they secretly laughed at him: indeed, the whole pack of them present something similar to what found such glorious embodiment, two hundred years later, as an individual that became the image of a type,—in the figure of Sancho Panza. A given vital current creates under all circumstances an identical grouping of characters, identical relations and spiritual conditions, and often centres round a single person. The fact that history has so little to tell us on the subject only proves how stupid and unoriginal is the Muse of History, and what a coarse sieve she uses to collect such fine matter.

To this year belongs the love affair with a poor but high-born lady of Cordova, Beatrice Henriquez,

sister of Pedro de Arano whom he afterwards appointed governor of the settlement of Española. It seems that she was beautiful, and conceived an enthusiastic sympathy for a man at least thirty years older than herself. He must have had to thank her for much encouragement and kindness: indeed, in an hour of the darkest gloom, hers must have been the only heart that he really possessed, for in his will he most urgently commends her to his heirs, as being a person to whom he had the most sacred obligations: "What I do in this matter," he says, "is to ease my conscience, for it is a burden on my soul. I may not here give the reasons for this."

Why? Because the bond was not sanctioned by the Church? It seems so. His views on these matters grew stricter with the passage of the years; he fell under the dominance of the dignities he had won, and although there may be yet another secret concealed behind his words, illegitimacy can be a heavy burden on a man's conscience, and he was just the man to whom such a burden would have been torture. All Catholic writers have, of course, taken pains to cover up this moral delinquency by silence, or have tried to make out that the connection was legal.

The fruit of this liaison was a son, Hernando, the same who wrote his father's life in a much-discredited work full of false statements and picturesque misrepresentations. The book is like a

clumsy over-painting, which has forever destroyed the picture underneath.

It is probable that difficulties connected with the birth of his child out of wedlock made Columbus anxious to go to Portugal. There must have been outstanding business to settle, or important papers to set in order: perhaps, too, he was weary of the malicious way in which he was kept in suspense, and, in his distress of mind, really wanted to leave Spain, or to create an impression by his determination to do so. He sent a request to King John and asked for permission to be allowed to enter Portugal and remain there for a time unmolested. This reveals the fact that his former flight from that country was not a voluntary one. The king, who of course knew that the petitioner was in the service of the Spanish royalties, and regretted that he himself had rejected Columbus' offer of service, answered that he might come without fear; the letter concludes: "And because it may chance that you are threatened by the authorities in my Kingdom on account of certain events in which you were involved, I hereby assure you shall neither be put in prison, prosecuted, cited, or even examined in regard to any matter, whether it be civil or criminal, or otherwise."

It is not known whether Columbus actually undertook the journey. He seems merely to have made preparations for it and then to have visited his friends at La Rábida, just as depressed and just as

hopeless as he had been at the time of his first sojourn there five or six years before. The rumour was spread by himself or by his followers that he wanted to leave Spain behind him and try his luck in France and England: disturbed at this news, the queen sent him her authorization to reopen negotiations. She had a singular foreboding faith in him: and since she had heard of his vow to devote the gold of India to the conquest of the Holy Sepulchre, this feeling of hers had been combined with a kind of pious gratitude. A moving letter from Prior Juan Perez, in whom she had unlimited confidence, made what she had hitherto merely played with in her thoughts appear to her as a duty.

So she summoned Columbus. She sent him twenty thousand *maravedis* in gold for his journey and the replenishment of his wardrobe. He was staying with his doctor, Garcia Hernandez, at Palos—he had been driven to the seaport, he had to see the ocean, for he had begun to feel as if the sea was no longer there. The letter and the money were put into his hands. He was provided with a well-equipped horse, well-dressed servants and silk clothing. He rode to Santa Fé, in the Vega of Granada, where the Court then lay in camp.

But what had the queen to say to him? Nothing: or next to nothing. He must still have patience. Granada was on the point of falling: the infidels had shut themselves up in the Alhambra,

and every hour might bring the decision. December, 1491. Patience? He had used up the last remnants of his.

Hunger forced the Moorish King, Mohamed Boabdil, to surrender the city and the fortress: and thus Spain was entirely rid of Saracens eight hundred years after its conquest. There was great rejoicing in the Spanish camp, feasts of victory, and thanksgiving services. Might the unhappy suppliant now begin to hope? Would he get a hearing now? Sombrely, and with something like hatred, he looked upon the general gaiety; too much of his vital strength had been consumed, his body was decaying, his spirit had lost its resilience, his soul was frozen. He appeared before the royal pair to offer his congratulation: notice was taken of him, the queen honoured him with a gracious salutation and promised him that a commission should be set up to arrange some definite agreement with him. She kept her word. Talavera, who had just become Archbishop of Granada, was appointed to preside over the commission. He had not much regard for the exaggerated ideas of this Christobal Colón, and still less for the man himself. Still, the queen wanted him to treat with the man and he had to bring himself to do so. Columbus could be conceded the minimum of what was irreducibly necessary, and thus the affair would be settled, and the persistent old dotard would have to show whether his promises were anything more than mere hum-

bug. Good: but what, to the immeasurable astonishment of the royal pair, did, in fact, happen? The vagabond stranger, the starveling schemer, who lived on the charity of the Court and of a few grandees, and had abused the patience of the royal pair for years with his preposterous demands—no sooner had he extracted his first undertaking from the queen in the flush of her victory over the infidels, than he took such a tone as exceeded all the bounds of insolence; and it was really treating the man very gently to break off the negotiations and show the shameless fool the door.

Let us see. Columbus had then put forward his demands. He was in no way disposed to content himself with what the queen in her kindness offered him—a few ships, a limited amount of financial support, her gracious favour and protection; he made known to her on his side the conditions under which he was prepared to undertake the journey. And it is true that his demands were in no way modest. In fact, taking them as a whole and having regard to his position, they were such that the sober schemers of the Spanish Court had really to ask themselves whether the good man had not taken leave of his senses. The following were his demands. The position of Viceroy and Governor-General over all islands and continents that he might discover and occupy for Spain; appointment as Admiral of the World-Sea; a tenth part of all treasures—pearls, diamonds, gold, silver, spices,

fruits, and products of all kinds that might be found in the lands under his authority and brought back to Spain; exclusive ownership of one eighth of the lands to be discovered and conquered, including all the revenues therefrom accruing, against which he offered to bear one eighth of the cost of equipping the expedition (he had not a farthing in the world —probably the well-to-do Pinzon family had already promised to take a share in the capital outlay in the form of a ship); and finally, the inheritance of all these rights, titles, and dignities, by his successors, from first-born to first-born.

An astounding performance, that raises the whole problem of this mysterious human entity.

CHAPTER V

Last Obstacles and Final Departure

What gives the figure of Columbus its Don-Quixotic outline is not the central error that made him passionately deny until the day of his death that he had discovered a new continent and a new world; it is, putting the matter broadly, the orientation and constitution of his inner self—with all its shifts and pleadings, its prejudices, self-defenses, stipulations, and extravagances. So much so, that I cannot rid myself of the impression that Cervantes must have been influenced in his conception of his immortal knight by this actual prototype. It is not to be believed that so distinguished a genius created his world-famous figure in what may be described as a private literary caprice. The people and the nation have no less a part in such a magnificent vision than the immediate creator who brings it to the light of day. The centuries labour at it in silence until the chosen brain gives it valid form.

The association of ideas is not capricious nor does it spring from a literary whim. I have for a long time struggled against it. But the comparison was enlightening from every point of view. Before I grasped it I could not see the image of the man.

When I looked at him closely there appeared a cleavage between the various traits of character; it often seemed as though three or four persons were combined in him, as if he had not really lived, but was merely a clumsy invention of the historians, a symbolical Explorer-Hero, a sum of qualities artificially transfigured.

A man, it seemed, of uncommonly narrow mind, but at the same time predestined to enlarge the intellectual confines of his time in a manner beyond all expectation, and to revolutionise its world of ideas. He was a pious Catholic and, consequently, replete with pagan superstition regarding all natural laws and occurrences. His subjection to his Idea was almost hysterical and, indeed, nearly reached a point at which his individuality was submerged: yet he bowed to every force from without, listened to every whisper, and fell a victim to every fraud. Practical, astute, and competent in the composition of his plans, in their execution he showed himself amateurish, short-sighted, and capricious. He was as morose as a monk, crafty as a peasant, without a glimmer of humour—a character unrelieved by a single ray of cheerfulness. A man of sighs and lamentations, misery and gloom. But for all that, his capacity for suffering and his patience in the bearing of it were prodigious and are strangely touching, like stories from the life of a saint. He learnt almost nothing, and knew everything that might serve his ends. He was sickly, and bore the

most incredible hardships with iron endurance. He sprang from the lowest level of society, and had the manners of a grandee and the epistolary style of a Machiavelli. He knew no enjoyment of life, a home meant nothing to him, his wants were as few as those of a dervish, yet he died of worry because he could not get the forty thousand pesos owed him by the Colonial Administration.

Such complicated characters are rare in history, and when they appear, tradition takes little notice of their niceties and contradictions; time simplifies, and what is common to all and can be commonly understood, is driven to the surface. As a result of this, in the course of a few centuries every great historical figure becomes a weather-beaten torso, and if it is to yield the thousandfold truths of life it must be conceived and re-created like an image in a dream.

To see the prototype of Don Quixote in Columbus is to see the man himself. It is true that Don Quixote is a specifically Spanish type, and Columbus was an Italian. Moreover, he has some of the outstanding characteristics of his nation: nepotism, so observable in his career as Grand Admiral, is one of them. He preferred his sons, brothers, and sons-in-law over all others, and if there were any offices or posts of honour for distribution in the new lands he claimed them for his relations. His tenacity in the pursuit of an aim, his frugality of life, his dazzling eloquence—these are all Italian traits. But

though he was not Spanish by race, he was so by adaptation and adoption—the language, the country, and his own resolve made him a Spaniard. He was a homeless man, a wanderer; he never settled down, he merely occupied a lodging; he struck no roots, he merely stayed awhile and passed on.

His most remarkable trait, and the one most suggesting Don Quixote, is his pride, even arrogance, in his destiny—undeniably a force, but a very isolating force, the most fatal effect of which is to make its possessor misunderstood and to set him apart from life. Who could love a Don Quixote, except as a figure of romance; who could understand him except three hundred years after his death? I could not have passed a day with him; I should have found his observations intolerable, and everything he did repugnant. And yet, what an abiding prototype of humanity, of human folly, delusion, and greatness! Here, his pride in his destiny or what he thought to be his destiny, is based ultimately on a profound redisposition of stern Spanish Catholic dogmatism, through which the character, as the essence of the national entity, appears greatly sublimated and softened, and rich in cross lights; it stands like a monument somewhere between the figures of the Cid and the sinister Torquemada.

When Columbus represents himself as inspired by the Holy Ghost, he is convinced to the bottom of his heart that he is speaking the truth. When he

asserts that without the twenty-four books of the Old Testament, the Four Gospels, and the Twenty-three Epistles, he could have accomplished nothing, this is no rhetorical flourish, no hypocrisy, no attempt to ingratiate himself with the dignitaries of the Church; it is bitter, deep, earnest. And if he relies on Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville, he does so with the same gesture of gratitude and the same ardent faith with which Don Quixote calls Don Belianis and Amadis of Gaul his teachers and his heroes.

Many historical anecdotes became connected with the character, in whose name they circulate, like the false additions to antique statues. As, for instance, the notorious story to the effect that Columbus, in order to show the doubters and malcontents that what he had accomplished was not so difficult, crushed the end of the egg upon the table, after all the company had vainly tried to get it to stand in the desired position. (It may be remarked incidentally that the real author of this little trick was Brunelleschi, who wanted to prove to his opponents by this example that the elliptical dome of his Florentine cathedral was capable of construction.) Columbus could never have done such a thing. He would have denied his own self in the process. As a faithful Catholic, any freedom of the mind or judgment was forbidden: he could not have claimed it and been proud of it. His achievement did not seem to him something unimportant and

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fortuitous: it was in his eyes so tremendous, so inexpressibly great, that it could only be achieved by the direct assistance of God.

These unheard-of demands aroused so much irritation and displeasure at Court that for a while there was no talk of any further negotiations. A beggarly adventurer, a nameless foreigner, presumed to put forward claims to the highest offices of State —even to royal rank: the thing was unexampled, and with this infuriated amazement was combined contempt, for it was reported that the Spanish sun had probably been too much for the Genoese, and when he walked the streets with bent head, plunged in gloomy thoughts, the children jeered at him, and their elders pointed at their foreheads with their forefingers.

After a while attempts were made at a compromise; Columbus would not yield an inch, he was deaf to every objection, he met the representations of his friends with a chilly silence, and to prove that he was not disposed to give way to any point he again began to prepare for departure. The queen could not make up her mind. It appears that she stood, with hesitant attempts at conciliation, between the warring points of view of the Archbishop and the Finance Minister, Santangel. These two fought out the decisive battle, and the winner could not be predicted. Talavera maintained with increasing emphasis that Columbus was merely a futile dreamer: he pointed out that his demands,

even in the event of success, were immoderate, nay outrageous, and that if the affair came to nothing the credulity of the Spanish royalties would bring them into ridicule. Isabella could not bring herself to oppose him. She was as humble as a woman of the people before the dignitaries of the Church. On one occasion, during the discussion of some worldly matter, the General of the Franciscan Order had shouted at her, " I am in the right: and even if I am addressing the Queen of Castile, who is she? Like myself, a pinch of dust."

She was also of the opinion that the price was too high for the possible gains. Her mentality was too straightforward to enable her to understand certain Jesuitical suggestions on the part of Santangel, to the effect that an agreed treaty need not be carried out in all its details, and she turned to Columbus himself, but to her surprise she found him quite impenetrable to the voice of reason. That was the extraordinary thing: he forgot that he had no guarantees, that he was without reputation, poor, despised, and dependant; he saw the lands that he wanted to be the first to discover, already within his reach and actually before his eyes, and with the first faint glimmer of hope that his purpose might be made possible, he felt as though it had already been accomplished.

Perhaps it was exactly this that acted on the queen with the force of magic. She entered upon a veritable conflict. She was afraid of responsibility.

Her husband viewed the undertaking coldly, if he were not actually hostile to it, and he had, of course, a whole party on his side. Her only supporters were Alonzo de Quintanilla, the Archbishop of Toledo, the Treasury Chancellor Santangel, and the Marquise de Moya, who was a friend of the queen's, and advised her in Columbus' favour with an enthusiasm of which the motive is unknown: probably it was the most disinterested of all, born of a romantic feminine delight in strange and grand adventures.

Santangel and his following gradually got the upper hand against the king and Talavera. Santangel, an experienced man of affairs and an astute politician, could not be suspected of lending any support to vain chimeras. It is hard to avoid the impression that he was interested in the project in a way we cannot now establish. He brought forward arguments that made matters clearer to the queen. As she had had the courage, he said, to risk everything in her war against the infidel, why should she hesitate over a matter in which the loss was so inconsiderable and the gain so vast? He recalled to her mind what increase in power other princes had secured by discoveries; here was the opportunity to surpass them all. She must think, too, that success would bring much glory to God and much power to the Church. Failure could in no way bring the Crown into discredit: the trouble and expense involved would be outweighed by the

fact that such a voyage might solve questions of high importance and unveil wonders of the universe hitherto unknown.

The queen objected that the finances of the country had been completely disrupted by the war. She could not make an order on the Treasury in respect of a matter to which the king was opposed. However, after much anxious reflection, she expressed herself as willing to take the burden on her own Castilian crown, and to pledge her jewels to raise the necessary funds. Santangel replied that this was unnecessary—he could produce the amount required from the exchequer of Aragon. Isabella, now impatient to bring the business to an end, entered into an agreement with the king to raise a loan from him, at a considerable rate of interest, of seventeen thousand gulden. (If an average is taken between the various calculations of the historians, it would appear that her contribution to the cost of equipping the expedition amounted to about thirty thousand marks in to-day's money.)

Colón was then given to understand that the other side were willing to sign a capitulation. His conditions were accepted without further haggling. The agreement concludes with the words: "Done and executed in the City of Santa Fé, in the Vega of Granada, 17th. April, 1492: I, the King: I, the Queen." Two weeks later he was formally appointed Admiral, Viceroy and Governor of the lands yet to be discovered, and as a special fa-

vour the title of Don was also conferred upon him.

A strange fantastic dream-transaction, without example in history, by which both parties, with the same ceremonial seriousness, drew a bill upon the future without the slightest guarantee that it would ever be met. What a personality must this man have been, and what magnetism he must have had, to make the queen, the king, a clear-headed personage like Santangel, and many others also, feel the spell of the dæmonic problems that possessed his soul. They began by chasing him away, calling him a rascal and a fool for his ridiculous claims, and made it clear that they would have no more of him or his ideas: then, when he did not budge, they grew uneasy; in spite of their first indignation, they gave way point by point, until at last they yielded everything he asked, blindly and without question, as though they were weary of the whole fantastic affair and were only doing this to protect themselves from the reproach, or the self-reproach, of neglect. It was in some such spirit as this that a dubious personage, without name or position, was made Lord of the Sea and sovereign over a still undiscovered world.

Colón chose the port of Palos de Moguer as his point of departure, probably because the Pinzon family, who had promised him a fully equipped

caravel, lived there: this was the eighth part which he had undertaken to contribute to the total cost of the expedition. It has long been assumed that the Duke of Medina-Celi advanced him the money for the ship: but this is improbable, owing to the fact that the duke had stipulated that the expedition should put to sea from his own port, Santa Maria.

Columbus later on made a poor return, as his custom was, to the Pinzons for their assistance. Alonzo Pinzon was an experienced captain; without his intrepedity and skilled seamanship, Columbus would hardly have reached the West Indies. This, in itself, was quite enough to explain Columbus' grudge against him, and refusal to acknowledge his indisputable services. Alonzo's brother, Martin, subsequently maintained that the idea of the voyage of discovery originated with his brother: this, of course, is a family tradition based on a deep-seated feeling of injury, and is manifestly unfounded: but the feeling can be understood. When Diego Colón, in 1513, brought his famous action against the Crown, the documents of which were a mine of unsuspected facts, Arias Perez Pinzon, Martin's son, stated that his father possessed a parchment of King Solomon's time containing the words: "Sail through the Middle Sea unto the end of Spain and thence to the West, steering between the North and the South, as far as 95 degrees, and thou shalt find the land of Zipangu, fruit-

ful and abundant, and in size equal to Asia and Africa." He had bought this manuscript in Rome and carried it home, where he had shown it to Columbus. Hence the latter's scheme.

A fairy tale, which was, however, openly told to many generations of Pinzons by their nurses.

Palos may also have been chosen as the port of departure because, for an act of disobedience during the war with the Moors, the king had laid upon it the penalty of putting at the disposal of the Crown two ships equipped for twelve months. By an order of April 30, 1492, the city magistrate was requested to get these ships ready for sea within ten days and hand them over to Christobal Colón. The burghers refused to recognise the requisition, and repeated orders and strong measures proved necessary. An official of the royal household, one Juan de Penalosa, was sent to Palos as the king's agent, with orders to fine the city two hundred *maravedis* daily until the ships were delivered. But as neither the money was paid nor the ships fitted out, the Government proceeded to a more drastic requisition: the caravel *Pinta* was without more ado taken from her owners.

Only the *Santa Maria* was a *Nao* or full-rigged ship, after the fashion of a galleon, with a complete deck: the two others, the fast-sailing *Pinta*, the "Painted Lady", and the little *Niña*, the "Baby", were light vessels with three masts, open amidships and decked at bow and stern, rising to a con-

siderable height, castellated fore and aft, and with cabins for the crew. The *Niña* had only lateen sails. The *Santa Maria* was chartered on behalf of the queen and carried the Admiral's flag: Colón himself commanded her. The captain of the *Pinta* was Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and his brother Vincente Yañez commanded the *Niña*. Sancho Ruiz, Pedro Alonzo Niño, and Francisco Roldan (the subsequent rebel) were engaged as pilots. Rodrigo de Escobar accompanied the expedition as Royal Notary: Diego de Arana of Cordova, uncle of Beatrice, was Chief Alguazil, and Rodrigo Sanchez of Segovia was Inspector-General and representative of the Government. The owner of the *Santa Maria*, who was later to become famous as the cartographer, Juan de la Cosa, served on his own ship as *mæstre*, and the owner of the *Pinta*, Christobal Quintero, a burgher of Palos, seems to have taken part in the expedition as passenger: a few other persons accompanied it in the rôles of what might be called private adventurers. One doctor and a surgeon were found prepared to undertake the dangerous voyage.

These were people who sought their own advantage, dreamed of riches, and were willing to risk something for their dream,—bold men accustomed to the sea, not easily frightened, for whom this strange enterprise had an alluring charm: or, again, royal officials who, in their consciousness of duty done, obeyed a higher motive. But all these were

no use to the new Admiral; they did not constitute a crew, they could not carry out the heavy work of navigating a ship. How could the necessary hands be procured? That was the problem at the outset, for the news of the Genoese captain's expedition had spread a superstitious horror among the sailors and common seafaring folk, and a definite conspiracy seems to have existed to refuse to serve under him.

As a result, a royal proclamation was issued that all criminal proceedings would be suspended against any persons willing to take service on the ships of the Captain-General Christobal Colón: surely the most desperate measure that could be devised. In an order addressed to the criminal administration of the kingdom as a whole, it is stated: "You know that we have commissioned Christobal Colón to voyage across the ocean. He now tells us that, in order to obtain crews for his three caravels, it will be necessary to give security to those whom he engages, since they will not otherwise go with him. And as he has prayed us to give orders to this purpose, we hereby give security to all and sundry persons who embark with the said Christobal Colón for the said voyage on the said ocean, that they shall be subject to no loss nor punishment in respect of their bodies or their possessions, for any crime of any kind that they may have committed up to this day: and this shall hold good for the duration of the voyage until their return, and for two months thereafter."

It seems unnecessary to say that men were found in plenty: the most infamous company of ruffians presented themselves—highwaymen, pirates, escaped prisoners, gallows birds, thieves, murderers, coiners, branded convicts from the whole kingdom. Columbus had no choice; he enrolled them. (An odd reminder of the tragi-comic scene in which Don Quixote knocks the fetters off the galley slaves, talks to them like a knight-errant, and is laughed at for his pains.) But even among this scum of humanity there were some who could not be bought, and withdrew, although the pay was that of ships of war, and four months' advance was offered. Fear was stronger than any inducement, the city and the port were humming with evil rumours, there was defiance and hostility everywhere, so much so that the hands engaged on repairing the ships were reluctant to continue their work, and the strongest measures had to be taken to deal with the prevailing prejudice against Columbus.

At last, in the first days of August, all obstacles were overcome, and the fleet was ready for sea. Columbus put his affairs in order, bade farewell to his patrons and friends, and placed his son Diego, who had hitherto been at the convent of La Rábida, under the care of a priest in the city of Moguer, who was later on to take him to Court, as the queen had, by an *albala* or patent, appointed him page to the Prince Juan, an honour that was conferred only on persons of the highest rank.

That they might not enter upon their voyage with burdened consciences, the Admiral, with his captains, pilots, and all his crews, went to Mass, Confession, and Communion at La Rábida. On the three ships there were one hundred and twenty persons in all. Columbus stayed the night in prayer and in conversation with the Franciscans; on the morning of August third he left the monastery in the company of the Prior Juan Perez and went down to the harbour. The whole population of the place was assembled on the bank of the Rio Tinto. At eight o'clock the Admiral, from the deck of the *Santa Maria*, gave orders in a mighty voice to hoist the anchor and let go the sails in the name of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VI

Voyage into the Unknown

If Christopher Columbus is the man who, according to the common historical view, shut the door upon the Middle Ages and inaugurated a new world and a new age, the moment when those three paltry vessels left that Spanish harbour is one of the most epoch-making in the history of humanity.

Consider merely the stupendous fact. It has become as familiar to us as the multiplication table, so that we have lost the measure and perception of it. What is unique is, by its very nature, doomed to stand outside any comparison, and the most violent enkindlement of the imagination often blinds us to the image that aroused it.

The greatness of these men's resolve lay not in the rupture of all hitherto existing bonds, in leaving behind them the life they knew, all that they had learnt to trust and had brought them satisfaction—use and wont, livelihood and security, society and law—not, I say, in leaving anything behind, but far more in the impulse to bring the future to fulfilment, to give reality to what lay before them, but had not yet emerged to life.

In this may be seen that splendid mysterious

power of mediæval man, who knows no independent purpose, but remains an instrument in all his deeds and feelings with his gaze upon an unknown being whose creature he is. The religious element in Columbus is no pretext or embellishment, nor does it rest upon any dogmatic view of life; it is the very heart of the man himself. This is his attitude to the consciousness of his mission, his vocation, and in this way he feels that man must pit himself against the elemental forces as against some lower form of soulless life inimical to God, and master them: and such was the purpose of his voyage.

It is extraordinarily difficult to reconstruct, with even the slightest prospect of probability, the experiences of these men who, on their poor, defective old ships, sailed forth into the limitless waste of waters. Any such attempt would either consist of emotional complexes borrowed from to-day, or of pure fancy: one would be as unsatisfactory as the other, and both would be mere experiments. It is, I think, beyond the power of representation or of thought. Every modern achievement that can in some measure be compared with it—the crossing of Africa, the discovery of the South Pole, the flight over the North Pole and across the Atlantic, and all the other great deeds of the last century—was conceived and carried out within the tradition of recognised natural laws, and in reliance upon a definite cosmic order.

Columbus and his followers were without such support—utterly without it. The conformation of the world, the size of the earth, the limit of human endurance, the effectiveness and reliability of various devices and equipment—all this was the merest assumption, conjecture, or superstition. Nothing was proved, nothing guaranteed by experience, nothing confirmed by any valid evidence. Out there upon the ocean, after a certain degree of longitude was passed, they were the very first men to sail those waters: every sight they saw, every experience that befell them, stood on the dreadful razor edge between life and death. The passing of the days was in itself a horror, and every mile they put behind them increased that horror. There is really no goal before them; what they have heard of it is pure imagination, or, at the best, merely an assertion; they can conceive no end to their journeying, the horizon is round and its very roundness is a torment to the eyes. Their gaze wanders despairingly between sky and sea; the ships dance round and round—back and forwards, left and right—twisting like vessels of clay on a maddening whirling potter's wheel; they feel sometimes as though they were bullets from a sling hurled across the roaring seas into the void. Here, indeed, was the source and subject of that horror—the void—the apprehension of nothingness: every one of us has known it as a child, in a dream, and it is an atavistic dream: we make ready to set out for the

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end of the world, and our whole soul is filled with a mad horror of the void.

A portion of Columbus' letters and reports was discovered by Navarrete, a Spanish naval officer, among the archives of the monastery of St. Estéban, and of the Duke of Veragua, a descendant of the Admiral. They are written in Columbus' own hand, and it was often difficult—even almost impossible—to decipher the old-fashioned handwriting, the faded letters, the obsolete nautical expressions, and the constantly interspersed Italian and Portuguese words, and to translate the cursive style, entirely innocent of punctuation, into modern speech, without destroying the characteristic flavour of the original. The logbooks had already been published by Hernando Colón, in conjunction with Bishop Las Casas, in 1536.

Columbus' most notable quality, however, both in this and on his later voyages, to which, indeed, special attention is called by Alexander von Humboldt himself, is his correct and acute observation of phenomena that, broadly speaking, were completely outside his experience. He makes the most scrupulous and exact notes on the direction of the currents, on the island-like deposits of sea grass in the so-called Sargasso Sea, the changes in the temperature of the air, the flight of the birds, and more particularly on a matter that must have been

extremely disquieting to him and to his followers: the deflection of the magnetic needle, and the consequent movement of the Polar Star—a discovery that he was undoubtedly the first to make.

It was on September 13, 1492, as night fell, when he observed that the magnetic needle was shifting from northeast to northwest, which, as he confesses, threw the steersmen into no small agitation. He rectified the needle by methods that were probably as involved as his description of them certainly is, and although it is quite clear from his account of the whole matter that, scientifically speaking, he had no exact idea of what had happened, and shared his pilots' fear that the fundamental laws of Nature were changing and he was entering on a new world with new laws, he had some inkling of the fact that the deviation of the needle might be a means of discovering the degree of latitude and determining their position.

He was never able to make a nautical reckoning himself, his knowledge would not carry him so far; and when he tried, the result was lamentable, as numerous specific investigations have proved. But scientific research was not his purpose: he could note an effect, though he could not establish the cause; he could use his eyes, he could formulate questions, and his mind was keen enough to peer into the possibilities behind what he saw. This is not the accuracy of the observer, indeed it is not observation at all: it is a category by itself and

an important one. His collected reports, whether they deal with the disquieting behaviour of the compass, the changing appearance of the seaweed, the flight of birds, or whatever it may be, are the most striking evidence of the fact that he was not in the least an observer; he was a " visionary ", and conceived and faced his task entirely from this point of view. If this at least were not the case, he would be indeed the charlatan and adventurer that his envious and malicious contemporaries often liked to represent him.

But I am very conscious of the fact that, with all this, I have but sketched the merest outline of his nature and his character.

The logbook begins, ceremoniously and circumstantially, with an invocation to the Spanish royal pair; then follows a survey of the writer's services and exertions, following which he offers his thanks for all kindnesses and rewards received, or at least he drily records them, and promises to write down every night the events of the foregoing day until he has discovered India: " And the main result of this will be," he writes in his uncompromising way, " that to fulfil all my duties I shall have to learn to do without sleep."

This was no boast; he literally did so. As he says, he had actually for weeks together to do without sleep. In this connection I find him extremely

mysterious. It is true that in those first weeks it was difficult for him to rest and sleep. From evening until dawn he stood on the bow of the *Santa Maria*, his light-grey eyes fixed upon the West in a cold glow of fanatic passion. It is difficult to suppose that his subordinates loved him: such men are not loved. "I am not soft of speech," he writes of himself; "I am commonly thought harsh." The paralysing tension in which he lived until October twelfth drove him away from human society, and though there were men on board who were afraid of nothing and no man, they gave him a very wide berth, just as they would have avoided a notorious magician. On that account he had to be more on his guard with them, than they with him. To prevent their growing impatient and insubordinate too soon, at the very outset he seized upon the somewhat dubious means of deceiving them as to the distance they had sailed: he kept double records, one for himself with the correct total of sea miles, and one, with reduced figures, for the crews—measures that were, no doubt, adopted on all the caravels, for in calm weather it was quite easy for one vessel to communicate with another.

One peculiar feature of his diary is that for a time it is recorded in the first person, and then, without transition, he begins to speak of himself as the Admiral. It would not appear that this is merely carelessness of style or empty form. The reason certainly lies deeper. "I" and "The Admiral"

are strongly opposed manifestations of himself. They were two persons of different rank, different responsibility, and different importance, one of them a suspicious, feverishly excitable, dream-tormented, self-tormented, weary, obstinate man, and the other, a being not wholly of this world—the instrument of divine power, an infallible spirit.

Three days after their departure the tiller of the *Pinta* broke (Christobal Quintero, the owner of the vessel, came under suspicion of having intentionally caused the damage), and the flotilla had to put in to the Canaries, and could not resume their voyage until the eighth of September. On the seventeenth he records in his logbook that the air was growing continually milder and that he had seen a white bird that never sleeps upon the sea. On the nineteenth the fleet was four hundred miles out from the Canaries. On the twentieth some one caught in his hands a bird like a sea swallow, which on further investigation proved to be a river bird. They also met with an *alcatraz*, a sort of pelican, flying from northwest to southeast, and Columbus, accordingly, assumed the existence of land in the northwest. On the twenty-first there was a calm, and in the night the sea had become thickly covered with grass. On the twenty-second, when a contrary wind got up, Columbus writes: "The Admiral said, that the contrary wind was needed, because there was some murmuring among the crews who believed that in these latitudes there were no

winds that would make a return possible." On the twenty-third the crews began to give serious signs of trouble, because, although the sea remained continuously calm and smooth, a swell began to rise without any sign of wind, and became so formidable that they were all dismayed. Upon which Columbus says: "Such a thing has never happened, except in the time of the Jews, when the Egyptians set forth from Egypt to pursue Moses."

Day after day the same entries occur: slackening and freshening of the wind, birds and fish sighted, delicate clouds on the horizon, curious stretches of motionless green grass on the surface of the water that roused bitterly delusive hopes of land, the course of the stars, a floating branch covered with wild roses, a cane-shaft picked out of the sea. There was serious uncertainty as to their direction, and much consultation from ship to ship with Alonzo Pinzon as to a change of course, and the more experienced captain of the *Pinta* curtly imposed his superior judgment on the expedition: the Admiral gave the direct course to the west and ordered the helmsman to steer west-southwest.

In later years, there has been a great deal of scepticism as to Columbus' steadiness of purpose during the voyage: it has been maintained that it was he himself who, under the influence of the general uneasiness, lost his nerve and began to play with the idea of turning back: and that it was actually Alonzo Pinzon who saved the expedition by his

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determined, even threatening, demeanour. And to detract a little from Pinzon's merits, it is added that for him so many material interests were at stake that he could not turn back halfway with the deed undone.

I do not believe one word of it. There may be external testimony to this effect; the inner improbability is obvious. And even had it been true, even if there were a single scrap of traitorous evidence to bear it out—the weakness of a day or of an hour—it would be humanly and psychologically false. Research will sometimes uncover evidence and confirmation of a purely destructive nature that creates confusion just where the image and perception fail. Go back? The words did not exist for the Admiral " of the Oceanic Sea." Don Quixote lets himself be scorned, despised, he gives up sleep and food, he will surrender all and everything; but he does not go back.

Hernando Colón relates that the mutinous crew conspired together to throw the Admiral into the sea some night when he should again be " drunk with the stars." (How telling and real is the picture of the man in that brief phrase! He stands here once and for all, as though El Greco had painted him.) The violent scene in which Columbus was allowed three days by the indignant rabble—if land was not sighted by then his life was to be forfeit—this dramatic stage effect goes back to the contemporary historian Oviedo, an undiscriminating

collector of doubtful information. We may well credit the Admiral on the fact that mutiny was not far off, however sceptically we view his statements in other respects: but if matters had reached so open a crisis he would certainly not have hesitated to report it with all the prolixity and grandiloquence characteristic of him upon such occasions: it would have been a welcome opportunity to assume the aureole and pride himself upon his superior force of mind. He speaks, however, of passing outbreaks of impatience on the part of the crew, of sudden attacks of despondency that died down once more, of unrest, uneasiness, and even insubordination, but of mutinous excesses there is not one word: on the day on which open mutiny was said to have taken place, the tenth of October, he notes: "The men complained of the length of the voyage and refused to go on. The Admiral calmed them by pointing out the advantages they would get from the expedition. But he also added that their murmurs were in vain, as his absolute determination to reach India was unshakeable."

He did not disguise from himself that his position grew more and more hazardous every day. All indications that the limitless waste of this desert of waters would at last reach a shore had come to nothing. The mountains and cities descried in the distance had proved to be hallucinations. The ships were not built for so long a voyage and if with every moment they increased the appalling distance

that separated them from home, how could they manage the return journey? There was not a single port where they could put in to refit and get fresh provisions; and their supplies were growing disquietingly scanty. He realised the danger, of course, although he possibly underestimated it, or did not let it impress him, living as he did ahead, reaching out into the future, "drunk with the stars." Such a man, spiritually isolated, spiritually unapproachable, must have had a stimulating effect on the wills of the rough, simple characters about him: in him the terrible enigma of the whole expedition stood embodied and visible: the close association of life on board ship had not let a single ray of light into that mysterious entity: he was dragging them into a world other than theirs, a world that was no world. Despair was as futile as revolt, since in the last resort all depended on him: they believed him favoured by Heaven and possessed of a magic that made him more powerful than any mortal man had ever been. Such, undoubtedly, must have been the reason for their adherence, for if they had not kept some such remains of confidence crystallised by fear, I see no reason why they should not have broken his head in three days and thrown his body into the sea, instead of allowing him, and the brothers Pinzon who had fallen under his spell, to drive them to an unknown death—for that must have been their fear.

In the before-mentioned "Process" of Diego

Colón, a certain Francisco Garcia Vallejo, who had been a sailor on the *Pinta*, twenty-one years after the discovery of America made the following statement: "In the night of Thursday to Friday, the eleventh-twelfth October, there was moonlight, and a man by the name of Juan Rodriguez Bermejo, a native of Molinos in the Province of Seville, caught sight of a white heap of sand, stared ahead and saw land. He immediately ran to a cannon, fired it, and shouted 'Land! Land!' The crew rushed up on deck and stayed there until daybreak."

The account in the logbook is different. It is there stated that the Admiral's straining eyes had already at ten o'clock detected a light moving to and fro which he at once recognised as kindled by the hand of man, and that it was seen by those whom he called up to look at it. He ordered the man at the mast-head to keep a most careful look-out, reminded him of the ten thousand *maravedis* reward promised by the queen to the man who should first see land, and undertook to add a silk coat on his own behalf.

But the poor sailor never got his reward: the Admiral claimed it for himself, immediately after the Te Deum sung by the crews next day on all three ships. Some said avarice; others said vainglory: and others said both. His most devoted advocates do not venture to acquit him of shocking meanness. But neither explanation touches the quality somewhere between them, the true background of such

acts,—his insatiable greed of tangible recognition, as though the Earth, Humanity, and Fate were bound to pay him unmeasured tribute in great things as in small.

Seldom can any mortals have had a more exalted moment than Columbus, when he went on land at Guanahani. Seldom, too, can any Te Deum have been the prelude of such bloody tragedies, such orgies, and such slaughter, as followed upon that sung by the crews of the Admiral's three ships on October 12, 1492.

CHAPTER VII

The Indians and the Gold

The island was called Guanahani: a melodious combination of syllables, like the speech of an earlier world, alluring, onomatopœic. It belongs to the Bahamas group: much controversy on the part of learned geographers has led to the provisional conclusion that it is the Watling Island of to-day. Investigations on the spot would have been to little purpose: no local traditions existed, for a few years after the discovery of the island the good-natured and confiding inhabitants of the whole archipelago were transported to Cuba like cattle for the shambles, to dive for pearls, or carry out the most terrible forced labour in the mines, so that in a very short time they had all perished. By the year 1520 Spanish ships found the once-flourishing island completely deserted.

The Admiral summoned his two captains and the notary of the fleet and asked them to bear witness that he had in that hour taken lawful possession of the island for the king and queen. He drew his sword, unfolded the banner of Castile, and commanded the assembled crews to swear an oath of loyalty to him as Admiral and Viceroy. He had

THE LANDING OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

October 12th, 1492

After an engraving by D. Edwin from the painting by E. Savage

doubtless long since thought out this solemn ceremony in all its details. It was the realisation of the first of how long a succession of dreams! What happens to one man in a million had happened to him: the fulfilment of his most secret and most ardent dream. The chroniclers assure us that the whole company were almost demented with enthusiasm: they crowded round the Admiral, embraced him, kissed his hands, and those who yesterday had been most mutinous were now the humblest and most grateful of all. It is not surprising. No human reason was equal to the explosive power of that moment. There are strong emotions, under the spell of which villains cease to be villains, weaklings cease to be weak, the gloomy abandon their melancholy, the elemental forces of human nature break through, and overwhelm and consume all individual qualities and aims. This scum of Europe could not have been satisfied with harmless demonstrations of joy: with that maniacal delirium must have been combined the wildest hopes, and the fury of a greed still unexpressed changed each and all of them in an instant into a secret conspirator prepared for any shameful deed.

I was a boy ten years old when I first read how Columbus had taken "lawful" possession of Guanahani. I remember that the expression "lawful" so astonished me that I puzzled over it for a whole day. I asked myself, in my ingenuousness, how that could be possible since there were men

already on the island who had presumably lived there from ancient times. What particularly astonished me was the way in which the proceeding was taken as a matter of course, and that the Spaniards did not at least enquire whether the land already belonged to any one. In this event it seemed very strange to me to use the word " lawful ", and I was perplexed. It was of course a childish attitude of mind, as I realised later, especially when I found the story told in all the books in the same matter-of-fact way, and I met no one who shared my perplexity.

The Admiral caused the natives to be summoned to his presence, and he writes about them as follows —the first words ever written by a human hand concerning the flower-like creatures of that island world. " I knew that they were folk who could be more easily converted to our Holy Faith by kindness and persuasion than by force, and I gave some of them glass beads, coloured caps, and many other matters of no value which gave them great satisfaction and soon gained us their friendship. Thereafter they would swim to our ship bringing parrots, balls of thread, wooden spears, and many other things, which they exchanged against what we offered them—toys and little bells. Men and women went quite naked, they were well grown and had fine limbs and faces. Their movements were graceful, they would make good servants, of very good character, and I also think

they could be turned into Christians without difficulty."

Two days later, when he had decided to steer to the southwest where, from information given by the Indios (as he called them, for he was convinced he was in India) there was further land, he notes that at the break of dawn the shore was crowded with young men only, all tall in stature. "They are truly a fine race," he states. "Their hair is not curled but falls in straight locks and is coarse like horse-hair. Their eyes are fine and of good size. Their skin is not dark but like that of the people on the Canaries, and their feet are likewise just the same. I questioned them carefully so as to learn whether they had any gold. I noticed that some of them carried a small piece of gold in a hole which they make in their noses, and I succeeded in ascertaining by signs that if I sailed round their island towards the south I should find a country whose King possessed a great deal of this metal. I tried to persuade them to accompany me thither, but I soon realised that they would not. [In other words, he took a number of them by force and compelled them to act as guides.] The gold they carry in their nostrils is found in the soil, but I shall not have any search made for it, in order not to lose time, for I want to make the best of my way to the Island of Zipangu."

The occurrence described above is constantly repeated. He left Guanahani, to which he gave the

name San Salvador, and discovered a second island which he called Santa Maria de la Concepcion, a third which he named Fernandina, and a fourth which was christened Isabella. A very proper order of nomenclature: first, the Saviour and the Mother of God, and then the earthly Majesties. He was everywhere greeted by the Indians with shy friendliness, after they had overcome their extreme fear of the strangers whom they took for gods and demigods. There was never the slightest sign of hostile intent, or of misbehaviour—at the most they occasionally stole some trifling matter from one of the ships—something glittering or gay, which had aroused their primitive craving: then they would run off as fast as they could to carry it into safety, but when called to account, they were perfectly ready to give up their entire possessions if only they were allowed to keep the marvellous object—a scrap of mirror it might be, or a piece of red cloth. (Such, so it seems, has at all times been the behaviour of the so-called savage: the refuse of European civilisation—the scrap of mirror, the fragment of cloth, are enough to throw him into an ecstasy and make him worship the super-natural being who can produce such things. Two hundred and seventy years after Columbus, Captain Cook had exactly the same experience in the South Seas.)

Their whole attitude toward the new arrivals was one of admiration and reverence. Ancient sagas, which were living traditions among all the tribes,

from the islands as far as Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru, had aroused in them the expectation of god-like beings, sons of the Sun, who were to come out of the East and bring with them immeasurable joy and splendour: a redemption-myth that accompanies humanity through all the forms of its early consciousness. "They thanked God," notes Columbus on the fourteenth of October, "flung themselves upon the ground, raised their hands to Heaven, and invited us to land." But the next morning, the first matter before his mind is to settle on a place where he can build a fort. A little ashamed, he goes on to say that it was perhaps unnecessary as the natives were very innocent in matters of war. This business of the fort is no small dishonour to the civilised as compared with the uncivilised man, the warlike pious Catholic against the peaceful heathen, and enables us to grasp Columbus' anxiety as to how these infidels can be quickest metamorphosed into Catholics. He feared for their salvation. The sight of so much that should be the Church's property, then without a master, made him depressed. Yet at the outset he did not know how to set about matters: he and his emissaries were not particularly dexterous in questioning the "savages" and there were singular misunderstandings, but the Admiral only heard what he wanted to hear; in other words—he heard nothing. Intent only upon the ever-present dream-picture, he was always expecting the Great Cham's

ships to appear in the harbours that he had discovered, and he believed he would certainly reach the mainland of Asia in ten days. As he would not budge from this conviction, all the Indios' information was falsified, and translated into the terms of his own preconceptions: and when any of the interpreters he had on board, such as the learned Jewish linguist, Luis de Torres, were at a loss, Columbus was very ready to supply the deficiency. When he heard tell of a place called Cami, he thought the Grand Cham was meant, and when the natives talked of the great island of Cuba, he understood them to mean Zayton and Quinsay. They brought him vegetables and fruit; but he wanted gold. He noticed and recognised their trustfulness and good nature, their eagerness to be of service, and their readiness to worship him as a god, but he quite overlooked their utter poverty, and remarks with astonishment that they make nothing out of gold, a fact which merely serves to confirm him in his conviction that every one of these little garden paradises is overflowing with hidden gold.

His observations do not warrant any valid conclusion as to his own innermost feelings towards the Indios. So far as I know, no one has made this question a subject of enquiry, although it is certainly calculated to throw light on many mysteries in his character. One cannot take him at his word, and there is nothing that the historian can grasp.

THE LANDING OF COLUMBUS

Fifteenth-century man, in his dealings with social convention and the precepts of humanity, displays a capacity for dissimulation that is quite beyond the notions of the man of to-day; and if we were to say that the islanders were no more to him than living figures in an unfamiliar but delightful landscape, we should be just as wrong as if, in the sentimental spirit of the eighteenth century, we assumed that he regarded them as simple creatures of nature whom he wished to liberate from the darkness of ignorance. One may only premise an utter insensitiveness, not merely of the kind common to all men of his time against non-Christians, naked heathen, and savages in the darkness outside the faith; it was more: it was the blindness and deafness of a man, obsessed as he was by his idea, to every phenomenon on earth, unless he needed it to make that idea fruitful and more effective. For this reason, it is not correct to speak of Columbus' avarice, as is often done: his insatiable lust for gold has other roots than common greed. Don Quixote is not avaricious when he weaves his fancies about the treasures of the Emperor of Trebizond: he looks on them as tribute owed to his destiny, he needs them to establish his position.

Columbus' attitude to the Indios was, from the very outset, cowardly, treacherous, and capricious. On the one hand he cannot sufficiently praise their simplicity and honesty, and on the other he racks his brains over the best way to make the most profit

Baneque that it can be seen beneath a thin layer of earth." On November 25: "The Admiral went to the river and saw a number of stones spotted with gold." His greedy thoughts deceived him; it was common limespar or mica schist, as was proved upon investigation later on in Spain.

He thought and dreamed of nothing but gold. It was his torment, the spur that drove him on, his obsession, and his hope. I have spoken of the need for self-justification that lay behind Don Quixote's ambitions, which, so deeply was that tormented spirit divorced from reality, could never be satisfied. Gold, too, is a means of self-justification, but it also discloses an abyss: a man who speaks of gold with such obsession, who lusts after gold, a man of ripe age, thereby betrays the fact that his previous life has been passed in poverty and want; nay, more, that the social conditions of the time must have been immeasurably narrow, oppressive, and burdensome, at the Court, among the middle classes, and among the people generally, and, indeed, in Europe as a whole. And the history of civilisation confirms this judgment. We find no gaiety, no ease, not the most timid enjoyment of life, and men could only make good the penurious austerity that put private life in fetters by pompous processions, religious ecstasies, and bloody orgies.

But this solution is not enough; we must go deeper. And deepest of all lies fear.

It is true that he had to have tangible proof that he was not the futile visionary that his enemies held up to contempt: he could reduce to silence at one stroke those sceptics who had brought him so much misery and disappointment, and whose voices, faces, crass contradictions, and malignant calumnies had so long tormented his slumbers: he only needed to empty a few sacks of gold at their feet, and they would have to believe in him; they would have to admit that he was a superior being, a man to whom they had done most bitter wrong. He enjoyed in anticipation their amazement, their shame, their humiliating excuses; for poor parasites, as most of them were, could only be forced to recognise his deserts by the glitter of gold,—that most irresistible of arguments. His past, his character, and all his utterances make it clear that he was a man of grinding, ineradicable resentments.

But those who had stood by him and made sacrifices for him must first of all be convinced. If he returned with empty hands, no doubt they would not deny his success, they would extol his achievement, and not withhold the honor that was his due. But how should he requite them? Only if he could indemnify them, pay back with interest, and manifold interest, the capital they had advanced, and show them such abundance of wealth that what they had contributed would seem but the merest trifle against the profits they would draw—only thus could he meet them on their own level, as one

gentleman to another; a courtier and grandee like themselves.

Again the royal pair loomed before his inner eye with particular and pressing urgency. It was of extreme importance to prove to them that their favour and confidence had not been thrown away. He would crouch alone upon the deck for hours and picture to himself the monarch's friendly nod to him as he rose from his feet and said: "I was mistaken in you, Don Cristobal Colón, you are in very truth a great man." And to her, the queen, his high-hearted helper, daughter of the Church, unwearied champion of God, on whose behalf he had undertaken to free the Holy Land, his sisterly protector—for so he had always found her in private in spite of his slavish humility—whose favour had made possible this triumph of his life—to her he must express his gratitude in treasures such as no other prince in Christendom was ever able to display, so that her faith in him might grow deeper and she might become an even closer ally than before.

Here were infinite and fertile lands: truly a gift not unworthy of a queen's acceptance. But how should he give her an idea of the beauty and the natural wealth of the country that now belonged to her? By words, by a paltry description of them? A hopeless task. He does indeed try and his ecstasy is endless. "It was so wonderful—the lovely air, the splendid trees that bordered both banks of the stream, the clear water, and the landscape peopled

with innumerable birds, that the Admiral could hardly tear himself away." He said to his companions that a thousand tongues would be needed to give the king and queen some faint idea of this realm of Faerie. Or, at the sight of the bay of Baracoa: "The Admiral cannot praise the beauty of the land enough. The plain stretches away to the south-east, and great rivers flow forth from it, most noble to the view." And later, about the island of Española: "All the soil is planted and the valley is traversed by a river, which could be used to water the whole island. The trees are green and covered with fruit, the grass is full of flowers and grows very tall, and the air is as balmy as in Castile in April. The song of the nightingale is as delightful as the climate, and grasshoppers and frogs are to be heard on every side. I beseech Your Majesties to believe that the Island is so fine and fertile that only one who has seen it could describe it." Again: "I assure Your Majesties that there is not a better country nor a better people in the whole world. They love their neighbours as themselves, they have a most winning way of speaking, and always a friendly smile."

Poor halting voice, poor unseeing eyes, that can only see the crudest material facts, and miss the strangeness of new forms, the exotic luxuriance of the colours, the penetrating light, the silvery fluidity of the atmosphere. Poor paltry pen that can find no words for the joy of such a first experi-

ence. Sad slavish spirit, penned in its petty calculations, feebly trying to confine this new world of humanity within the scheme of its narrowest ideas, and while trying to reduce its life and soul and activity to some flat formula, neither grasps nor understands anything of its mysterious complexity, its age-long social and religious institutions and code of life. He is a merchant, valuing his wares, and seeing no possibility of displaying them to the purchaser so that the latter shall know what he is getting. A highly imaginative merchant, who has overstrained his credit and is kept ever on the alert by the hope of profit. He longs for the moment to come when he can proclaim his good fortune, when he can win faith for himself, for though he is moving in the midst of it, everything still seems strangely unbelievable. Impatience ever leads the way to fear: he is afraid lest the European world may never be aware of his discovery: there is the ocean to cross once more: the storms that he encountered on his journey hither will perhaps destroy him on his return. But even if they spare him, even if he reaches home safely, all is still uncertain, still supported solely by the story he will have to tell. Might not the New Earth that he has discovered for mankind prove a *fata Morgana*, and dissolve into non-existence when he turns away, even as it had had no real existence before he found it? That is his fear, the fear that what is real may prove unreal, the most shattering terror that can assail the spirit:

and that is why he scrapes gold together by any means and anywhere he can, for gold is the only reality that can prevail upon the mind : by means of gold he can make good his claims and prove his statements—it is the very essence of the veiled mystery, the image of his achievement.

CHAPTER VIII

Return and Triumph

All great men of action are great connoisseurs of their kind; they are born with an infallible instinct for the usefulness, the inner as well as the political value, of the people whom they attach to themselves and subordinate to their aims. One of the most striking traits in Columbus is his defective knowledge of men. He was most bitterly disappointed in every one to whom he gave his confidence —whether in an administrative post, a command, or the representation of his interests in Spain. He had an unlucky touch in the choice of his servants and helpers, and could never win either authority or respect. He was lacking in the consistency and cold intelligence necessary to get his orders carried out under all circumstances, but particularly in that quality of moral fearlessness that makes a man feared. He was always deceived and cheated, he constantly gave way to any one who knew how to stand his ground, and his capacity to command was rather like that of a petty official who by some absurd turn of fortune is suddenly promoted to be Minister. When his men learnt from the natives to smoke

tobacco and, as a result of the unaccustomed indulgence in the narcotic, fell into a state of coma and were incapable of work, he could not summon up courage to forbid the poison, but tried to shock them by pointing out the barbarous nature of the habit; and when they answered that it was no longer in their power to give it up, he merely remarked resignedly, "What sort of satisfaction you can get from a sort of smouldering tube is more than I can understand."

On November 21, Martin Alonzo Pinzon left him and the two other ships and went off on an independent voyage of discovery, not only without the Admiral's permission, as the latter states in his report to the queen, but demonstrably against his express orders. For six weeks Pinzon ranged over the neighbouring seas: it was plain desertion and Columbus could be in no doubt of it: however, when he reappeared one day Columbus did not so much as dare to call him to account. "Pinzon was engaged upon other matters," is all that he can find to say with cowardly brevity about this gross offence against duty and obedience.

One night the *Santa Maria*, the Admiral's ship, ran aground, owing to an unpardonable piece of carelessness. Columbus' account of the incident is as follows: "It was eleven in the evening when the Admiral decided to take some rest, as he had not slept for two days and a night. As the sea was calm, the helmsman also lay down to rest and left a young

sailor in charge of the tiller, which the Admiral had strictly forbidden. Then, at midnight, when there was not a breath of wind and the sea was as smooth as soup in a porringer, it pleased Our Lord that the ship should be driven by the current on to a sand bank, but so gently that it was scarcely noticeable. The young sailor raised a shout, the Admiral was the first to rush up on deck, and ordered the boat to be lowered and the anchor to be thrown out. The helmsman and several others sprang into the boat and the Admiral supposed that they would obey his instructions: but instead of this, their sole thought was to escape to the *Niña*, which lay half a sea mile away . . ."

Again this utter impotence. Moreover, there is no question of any punishment; he dared not risk anything of the kind. He had no trained and disciplined men under his orders; they were a rabble of highwaymen and escaped prisoners. The loss of the *Santa Maria* had far-reaching consequences. The *Niña* was too small to carry both crews across the ocean, so that the Admiral had to leave a part of his men behind on the island and place them under the protection of the cacique Guacamari, whose affection he had won and whom he trusted. These men were the first European settlers in the New World, and likewise the first who paid for the experience with their lives. Whether the Admiral was right or wrong to trust in Guacamari can never be established. It is, however, quite

certain that he was utterly incapable of understanding this or any other personality among the Indios: moreover, he took no pains to get any deeper insight into them, he formed an opinion, or a prejudice, and shut himself into it as though it had been a coat of mail.

His constant asseverations as to the innocence, generosity, and straightforwardness of the "savages" degenerate into garrulity. He is really always referring to himself when he expresses a high opinion of things and men. As time went on doubts had arisen in the minds of the Indios as to the divinity of these strangers. What the Spaniards thought was confidence was mostly curiosity, that irrepressible lizard-like curiosity of natural creatures, which is in certain circumstances stronger than the fear of death. It is reported that the men and women of one tribe took the Admiral's emissaries into their tent and felt them all over from their heads to their heels to convince themselves whether they were really men of flesh and blood. When Columbus soars to the assertion that they could hardly wait to become Christians and that he had seen them making the sign of the Cross and saying their *Salves* and *Aves*, he is inventing a pious fairy tale to please his pious mistress and provide a tasty morsel for the faithful at home in Spain.

Yet the cause of his deficient understanding of the West Indian people does not lie merely in his want of education, his enthusiasms or his prejudices, nor

again in his poor judgment of men; nor in that forced dissimulation of his that so entirely penetrated his whole being and thought that from the very outset he produced an impression of furtive hostility to his fellows: the cause lay in the age itself. To "understand" was not an ambition or a characteristic of the time. It did not interest the men of that age. They neither could nor would "understand" the individual natives as fellow creatures, nor would they understand another order of nature, another system of law, or another world. To say that all that interested them was colonisation, conquest, and robbery would be too facile a conclusion: it was in truth a bursting of the narrow bonds of the ego, and it was of little or no consequence whether another ego was destroyed in the process. It was a primitive movement of expansion, affecting kingdoms as well as individuals, without regard to love, humanity, or justice.

No European at the end of the fifteenth century would have shown more judgment in dealing with the Indios than Columbus: many, indeed, not so immersed in dreams and intent upon their achievement, would have used even more brutal methods: not one of them would have suspected or sought for the background of human history and culture, the secret of the race, the fear, the awe, the collapse of that ideal world, the subtle change of feeling that produced the delicate almost impenetrable cunning—using the word in its psychopathic sense

—that hid their true nature as though behind a mask.

The cacique Guacamari, a handsome, clever, and agreeable youth, according to Columbus' superficial description, had shown much friendliness to the strangers; he had loaded them with presents and soon entered into a close relation with their leader. When he heard of the disaster that had befallen the Admiral, he sent his men with some large canoes to the wreck, with a view to salving the cargo. "This was done extraordinarily quickly," says Columbus, "on account of the zeal displayed by Guacamari himself. He and his brothers and relations bestirred themselves to such purpose on board the stranded ship, as well as in keeping guard over what had been brought ashore, that all was done as conveniently as possible." He wept continually and tried to comfort the Admiral, telling him not to distress himself, for he would give him all that he had. Even the relations of the cacique lamented the misfortune of the shipwrecked seamen and placed their houses at their disposal. The Admiral invited Guacamari to dinner and marvelled at the decorum with which he behaved; the cacique in return entertained the Admiral with fish, game, and cassava cakes, and presented him with a belt richly adorned with gold. He also agreed that the Spaniards should establish a fortified settlement on his land. There was no lack of willing colonists, for all who volunteered

hoped to have collected or obtained by barter so much gold by the time of the Admiral's return as would place them beyond anxiety for the rest of their lives. Columbus himself reckoned on forty tons of gold for their Majesties, who would forthwith be able to set about the conquest of the Holy Sepulchre.

But did he not know what kind of thieving scoundrels he was leaving behind? And had the tears that Guacamari and his relations shed over the loss of the *Santa Maria* given him the delusive impression that these were men who would endure brutality and outrage with angelic patience? He was sorely deceived. He did indeed have the cannons fired in order to bring home to the natives the superiority of his weapons, an obvious trick and one constantly repeated later; and they were duly frightened out of their wits and fell flat on the earth in pure terror. But it was only a demonstration that he thought due to his position. He triumphantly assured his men that five Spaniards would be enough to dispose of twenty thousand of these defenceless dovelike savages, and he was so possessed by European arrogance and the sense of Viceregal dignity that he took the external ceremonial of hospitality and the conventional forms of a social code, without the slightest inkling of the dangers that lay behind them, as a guarantee of unconditional subjection.

On January 4 he bade farewell to the companions

he was leaving behind, recommended the City of Navidad most urgently to their care (he called it a city already, though it was, at first, no more than a primitive blockhouse), and started his return voyage upon the *Niña*. Two days later Alonzo Pinzon on the *Pinta* fell in with him, but the stormy weather that set in with the middle of the month separated the two ships once more. We know nothing of the experiences of the captain of the *Pinta* on his independent crusade: it would appear that the Admiral expressed no desire for any information, but grumbled at the truant as a husband might grumble at his wife when she has been amusing herself for a while elsewhere. He nursed his revenge in silence.

The *Niña* had too little ballast and was tossed about on the waves like a piece of cork: moreover, the keel leaked, and the crew had to stand by the pumps day and night. It seems that Columbus showed a very poor spirit on this voyage: exhausted by so many night watches and exertions, he was constantly tormented by the fear of death, and there were many hours in which he doubted whether he would ever get home. "A fly was enough to throw me into a state of quivering agitation," he complains hysterically. Amid the uproar of the elements he decided that destiny should choose one of their company to make a pilgrimage to Santa Maria de Guadalupe, when they were safely ashore. He had as many peas as there were

persons on the ship poured into a sack, and on one of them he cut a cross. He put his hand into the sack first and himself pulled out the pea that had been so marked. Then he breathed again and began to believe that God would preserve him to fulfil his work. However, he wrote a special report of his journey on a piece of parchment which he smeared with wax, put the roll into an empty cask, and consigned it to the waves. Then he summoned his crew and made them vow that they would all make a pilgrimage to the shrine nearest the point at which they landed in their own country, in hair shirts and invoking the Blessed Virgin. Such were his pious precautions under the burden of the fear of death. "The storm was so terrible that we gave ourselves up for lost," he records, certainly without exaggeration.

At the end of February the ship put in, not at the Canaries, but at the Azores. The Portuguese authorities made difficulties about their coming ashore, the governor took part of the crew into custody, and it was not until after a solemn protest by the Admiral, and the production of his written commission, that he was allowed to continue his voyage. He should have realised that this incident was the prelude to intrigues by the Crown of Portugal, with the purpose of contending with Spain for the new lands: notwithstanding this, he put in first at the Portuguese port Cascaes at the mouth of the Tagus. When he had cast anchor,

he sent a letter to the king, on receipt of which the latter invited him to Valparaiso, as the plague was raging at Lisbon. The monarch received him with extreme cordiality and asked him whether he would not prefer to proceed to Spain by land, which he would find much safer and more agreeable than going on by sea; but the Admiral, expressing his thanks for the king's kindness, and refusing all other marks of favour, departed on his sorry little ship.

The reasons that led him to send that imprudent letter, and pay that imprudent visit, are entirely mysterious. Did his torn sails and ragged shrouds force him to put in to the nearest port? But at a certain distance off the land only the slightest alteration in his course was needed to bring him equally quickly into a Spanish port. Why did he not do so? His failure to reckon with Spanish national pride, which must inevitably be wounded by a previous visit to a foreign port, was a piece of unpardonable stupidity. Perhaps he was afraid that Alonzo Pinzon had got to Spain before him. Perhaps he wanted to score a cheap triumph over King John, who had rejected his first offers of service, and was tempted by the idea of making his first appearance as Conqueror at a place where he had suffered his deepest humiliation, incurably vindictive as we know he was. It is in such traits as this that we have to look for the lurking mysteries of this complicated nature, which at times produces the effect of a character by Dostoievski.

On a Friday he set out; and it was on a Friday, the fifteenth of March, that the *Niña* put in with the tide across the bar at Saltes in the estuary of the Rio Tinto and anchored off Palos. The fear regarding the *Pinta* was unfounded: but by a strange coincidence Pinzon arrived on the evening of the same day and did not deprive Columbus of any of the welcome or the demonstrations that were his due —as though Providence itself had been willing that Columbus should be first. All hung on that: he must be first.

Immediately upon his arrival he sent a messenger to the Treasurer Santangel, and with him a circumstantial account of his voyage, intended for the king and queen. The Court was at Barcelona; he awaited their Majesties' commands at Seville. Wherever he appeared he was received with the greatest honour, and his entry into Seville aroused indescribable enthusiasm; high and low listened to his stories with unrestrained amazement. The king and queen despatched to their "Admiral of the Oceanic Sea" one of the most important officers of the household, to bid him welcome in their name, and to convey him their commission to fit out a second expedition, and invite him to come to them at Barcelona as soon as possible.

The pomp of his progress to the royal pair was truly magnificent. Seen with the eyes of a later century it was like a procession to a fair, a cavalcade of mountebanks, a circus on the march. As no

vehicles could be used in Spain at that time because the roads were too bad, the Admiral had procured a large number of horses and mules. Armed sailors headed the procession: no doubt they served to force a way through the populace. They were followed by exotic groups in appropriate settings—Indios with headdresses of birds' feathers, ornamented girdles and aprons of bright stuffs: their noses and ears were adorned with gold pendants, and they were made to wear bracelets and necklaces. Some of them carried spears and oars, inscribed with mysterious runes; others bore on their shoulders yellow, red, and green parrots whose shrill cries rang out above the shouts and cheers of the populace. Strange plants, stuffed birds, shells, spices, and glittering quartz were ostentatiously carried in gigantic baskets before the Admiral, who rode a horse, like his sons Diego and Hernando. Fourteen heavily laden mules with closed panniers, in which the treasures of the newly discovered Indies were supposed to be contained, brought up the rear under a strong guard. As soon as the runners reported that Colón was approaching the town, a large number of gentlemen and the most distinguished members of the merchant guilds rode out to meet him: at the head of them was the king's chamberlain who was to conduct him to their Majesties. The bells rang out from every tower, carpets hung down from every balcony, flags and kerchiefs waved from every window, and the streets

were clamorous with music and jubilation: the dream had come true. But the climax was not yet.

What happened first was something like a portent: as Colón approached the throne, the royal pair got up and would not allow him to kneel and kiss their hands. That meant that he was no longer a mere vassal, he was greeted and acknowledged as Viceroy of the Indies. An armchair was placed for him and he was invited to sit down. A distinction and a favour that benumbed his very soul with joy. He sat down upon the chair and looked with wide-open eyes round the throne room, dazzled. He saw the princes, dukes, archbishops, knights, and barons, and the gaily dressed ladies: the eyes of all were fastened on him with burning curiosity, all of them felt that they were about to learn something that would shake their inner world to its foundations: he watched their expectant eyes, he marked their longing for strange tales—could he stand the test? Would the simple truth of his adventures be enough or must he heighten them, recast them into signs and wonders in his excited mind? He began his tale. The sonorous voice rose out of the stillness like a mysterious song in an exotic night; with heads bent forward, the illustrious assemblage fell into an entrancement. They heard the words " New World ", and in that hour was the idea first coined; it was the amazing man himself who found the phrase, which, in that hour, had all the weight and splendour of a divine revelation. A New

World : now they knew : they knew that it existed, that it lay within measurable distance, a land that they could reach, tread with their feet, and explore. The narrator, of course, let himself be carried away by his enthusiastic recollection and by his own words and images, into romantic exaggerations; he could hardly help it. Who could resist the impulse of that fateful moment? But he had still plenty of reality to set before them. A sign, and the Indios appeared, as if upon a theatre stage; the baskets were brought and he took out of them the various products of the islands (the Spanish historian Muñoz was at pains to make a list of them): batatas, yam roots, Jamaica pepper, yuka root, Indian corn, lupine, bananas, plantains, cotton heads, tobacco, mastic resin, aloes, mangrove fruit, coconuts, bottle gourds, palm oil. Then came the animals : the American dog, a kind of rabbit called *utia*, a sort of large mouse regarded by the natives as a great dainty, crested lizards, and all manner of fish and birds. But most important of all was the gold : he put before the ravished eyes of the Court, gold in grains, gold in ore, gold dust, and worked gold : coins, rings, plates, masks, and pendants. It is recorded that the king and queen deigned to feel the weight of the metal with their own hands, and were unwearied in listening to Columbus !

The king then established Columbus in all the rights guaranteed to him under their agreement, and

bestowed on him further and special marks of distinction. The designation of Don was granted to him, to his sons, and to his brothers, though it was at that time confined to noblemen. He had the right to ride at the king's side. He was to be served at the king's table just like other grandees, and saluted like them on all solemn occasions. He received a coat-of-arms consisting of four quarterings: the two upper ones displayed the emblems of Castile and Leon—on the right a golden castle on a red ground, on the left a purple lion on a white ground: the lower quartering on the right bore a number of islands in gold set among waves, and the left quartering was for his own arms, but as he had none, it displayed five golden anchors on a blue ground. The motto was:

Por Castillo é por Leon
Nuevo mundo dió Colón.

There exists no letter, no document, not the slightest scrap of evidence as to how Columbus felt and behaved in those days of measureless fulfilment. He was one of those men who only proclaim their feelings in times of disaster and suffering; and nothing is recorded of them so long as they stand in the full light of glory (or merely in the favour of the great). Still, it is difficult to believe that he ever became cheerful or at ease: such natures grow all the more overcast with the gloom which their

hypochondriac humour can evoke without palpable cause.

And yet surely every man carries within himself the secret knowledge of his destiny or at least of the main colour and direction of his life. His passion for introspection must have taught Columbus what malignant powers he had stirred up by his triumph. For the time being the glory of his discovery was so great that he could stifle envy and hatred: the whole of Europe fell into indescribable frenzy, long-established traditions were collapsing, thousand-year-old barriers were razed, poverty now seemed no insuperable fate. There was space; ways were open to new fulfilments, the name of Columbus was as familiar to the beggar in Denmark as to the serf in Russia and the prostitute in Rome; and yet the man himself had the feeling that his achievement was turning to dust—as though it had robbed him of his real existence, and when slander and jealousy raised their heads behind him, they hardly touched him, because the achievement was too mighty to leave behind it more than a shadow-picture of its author.

CHAPTER IX

The Murderous Reality

Dynastic strife: the Crown of Portugal considered it had a grievance and claimed its rights. By three papal bulls dating from the middle of the fifteenth century it had been promised the exclusive ownership of all the land from Cape Bojado as far as India. A free gift. Rome, when steps had first been taken to make it worth her while, was very lavish with bishoprics, thrones, provinces, continents, and permanent indulgences. The power of the Church was unlimited in the spiritual sphere; and in the physical sphere she overcame all opposition by her iron discipline, her inexhaustible wealth, and her unequalled diplomats.

King John stated that the discoveries and annexations of Columbus detracted from the authority guaranteed to him, and, when he learnt that Spain was fitting out a second fleet, he lost no time in doing the same, so as to prevent his rival, if necessary by force, from sending a further expedition to the West. Spain, for her part, had hastened to solicit the favour of the pope (Alexander VI) for her plans, and induce him to invest her with the sovereignty of the newly discovered lands. Sumptu-

ous bribes were not wanting: the cornices of Maria Maggiore were gilded with the grain gold presented to the Vatican, as is recorded in an inscription on the spot. On May 3, 1493, a bull was issued wherein the Holy Father gave the New World to Spain " as a possession for ever ", with the condition that the dissemination of the Christian faith should begin forthwith. The globe was divided by a meridian line that ran from the north to the south pole a hundred leagues west of the Azores—all to the east of it was to belong to Portugal, all to the west of it to Spain.

A simple procedure. But there was no scientifically practicable method of fixing the boundary line: the chronometer, that would have made it possible, was not discovered until the end of the eighteenth century. Portugal was dissatisfied. She demanded that Spain should not be allowed to go farther south than the Canaries, thereby threatening to monopolise for herself the whole area of the hot zones. Spain, who at the moment was not engaged upon any war and had her hands free as the result of favourable treaties with France, would not be intimidated, forced back her enemy step by step and, after endless haggling, partly by word of mouth and partly in prolix diplomatic notes, the Treaty of Tordesillas was enacted, by which the most westerly of the Cape de Verde Islands were to serve as the starting point of the calculation, and the line of demarcation was to be drawn not a hun-

dred but three hundred and seventy leagues (about twenty-two hundred kilometres) from that point. Astronomers and pilots were to combine to settle the boundary: but it was never done—the task was impossible with the means then available, and the whole question remained in suspense. It was possible that the explorers, in the course of their voyages to the West and to the East, might collide and fall into an embittered dispute over territories that belonged to one or the other party. And this did, in fact, happen later on when Charles V, in his insatiable need of money, had once more to come to an agreement with Portugal and pledged the Moluccas to the king for three hundred and fifty thousand ducats.

In order to provide for a second expedition, the Crown of Castile raised a loan of five million *maravedis* from the Duke of Medina-Sidonia. But the sum was not enough, and the deficiency was made up by the stolen and requisitioned goods of the ejected Jews, their houses, money, jewels, and movable goods generally. Whether this arbitrary act, in any case a very common event in the history of the Continental Jews, had any causal connection with the discovery of America it is difficult to say with exactness, but it probably had. When a ruling prince needed money, the Jews had to provide it and, if they did not supply it in the desired quantity, they were dealt with in a very summary manner. They were proclaimed as deprived of all

the rights they had won with so much labour and humiliation; and the money they had amassed by endless industry and, for the most part, exemplary lives, handicapped as they were by a thousand monstrous and inhuman regulations and degrading bye-laws, was torn from them by a single edict and, if they escaped with their bare lives (which as a rule only a small percentage succeeded in doing), they might think themselves fortunate. They were treated like a particularly efficient savings box, which is broken open when it is considered to be full enough. Just as Columbus' achievement in the newly discovered world led from one deed of blood to another, it had its immediate sequel at home as well; hundreds of thousands of peaceful and innocent persons were deprived of all means of existence, hunted out of the country, and nearly as many again (the total is estimated at a quarter of a million) were cruelly put to death. It is strange to realise this, as it would seem that there could be nothing more beneficent and conducive to civilisation than for congested peoples to win new outlets, whether in imagination or in fact. Yet it must be based on some kind of impulse to self-destruction; humanity seems fated to engulf its noblest exertions and most auspicious undertakings in blood and tears. Under the rule of the Moors the Jews had become respected citizens, high State officials, world-famous teachers and men of learning, profound poets, honoured patrons: it was their time of splendour and ad-

vancement. The Spanish-Catholic spirit of the Inquisition and the pogroms made an end of all this with the speed and thoroughness of a blizzard: and we may note, incidentally, as a bit of epigrammatic horror, that the most pitiless persecution was organised by a Jewish half-breed, who had forced himself upwards until he had reached the highest position of the State, and had become a dreaded ecclesiastical tyrant and prelate-prince.

It was a squadron of seventeen vessels, great and small, that was collected in Cadiz Harbour. The Admiral's ship bore the name *Marigalante* and was distinguished by its size and strong construction. This time there was no need of any reprisals or forced enrolments: Colón could hardly keep off the stream of volunteers. Those who were not allowed to come fell into a sort of frenzy and in their first disappointment many put an end to their lives, for there were, of course, thousands of poor wretches before whose eyes an El Dorado had suddenly appeared. Those who were permitted to join lived in a positive fever of impatience: from the captain down to the humblest ship's boy they saw themselves already returning laden with gold, and gold was their single thought. Thus writes the Admiral, in his wooden ingenuousness, to the queen: "Gold is above all things the most excellent: he who possesses it has everything he can want in the world: nay more than this, with it he

can get souls into Paradise." There is not the slightest touch of irony in all this. Columbus' mind, though not devoid of contempt for his fellow creatures, knew nothing of irony; his experience was narrow and direct, and his manner of expression was quite innocent of metaphor: by getting souls into Paradise he meant exactly what he said, in the sense in which the Church uses those words, and, if he could do that, he would be absolved from all his sins. The rage for gold that broke out at that time all over Europe was a spiritual plague; the dying century bequeathed it to the next one, not a soul was untouched by it, and, if a historian took upon himself to write down the true story of the followers of Columbus, purged of the deceptive glamour of adventure, humanity would turn with horror from that grinning reflection.

With a view to the regulation of Indian affairs, a special body was established at the head of which was Colón as Admiral, Viceroy, and Governor: but only in name. The real head of it was the Archdeacon of Seville, Juan de Fonseca, confidential adviser to the king, a man of much worldly wisdom, more at home with ships, cannon, and ammunition than he was with Gospel and breviary: as a man of quick decisions, he imported an unwonted liveliness into the lethargic course of business in the Spanish Chancery. He had no great liking for Columbus: he envied him, he hated him, he tried to paralyse him, to hamper his activities and disparage his services wherever he could: but in silence and in

secret. A man who stood in so dazzling a blaze of glory must have his ways smoothed before him with every demonstration of alacrity. Thus, first of all, exact orders were issued regarding the supply, purchase, and hire of vessels, weapons, and provisions, which the commissioners were empowered to secure at suitable (*i.e.* quite arbitrary) prices: moreover, they were given authority, and the means of enforcing it, to seize by distraint, sequestrate, sell by auction, and otherwise dispose of effects and property of all kinds, together with "all that they might need appertaining thereunto." The corn merchants of Seville and Cadiz were ordered to supply four hundred bushels of corn, the alcalde of Malaga fifty suits of armour and fifty crossbows for the use of the Armada. An amusing piece of intolerance was the order that no ship and no individual, whatever his name and position, should be allowed to travel to the New World without the approval of the Admiral or the archdeacon, and that in no case should the permission be given to persons of other than the Catholic faith. Spiritual considerations stood supreme. For this reason their Majesties lent a gracious hearing to the Admiral's proposal that they should provide him with some active assistance in the conversion and instruction of the Indios. Twelve selected monks, who had deserved well of the State for their services in the expulsion of the Jews and Mohammedans and had already conducted many heretics to the stake,

were found worthy to bring the infidels into the bosom of the Church: their leader was Bernardo Buyl, a Benedictine from the monastery of Montserrat, whom the pope appointed Apostolic Vicar of New India.

With the expedition went miners, carpenters, farm labourers, masons, locksmiths, tailors, shoemakers, weavers—in all more than a thousand paid hand workers. A force of trained soldiers was needed to protect the peaceful settlers: twenty Lancers from Granada deserve mention, as before long they became the bloody terror of the Indios. A large number of men of noble birth had pressed to be allowed to join an expedition with such prospects, and among them the high-spirited young Alonzo de Ojeda, a genuine knight-errant, daring and accomplished, whose deeds had made him the idol of enthusiastic youth. No member of the Pinzon family took part in this voyage. Martin Alonzo had died a few days after his return. Sentimental historians have asserted that chagrin had shortened his life: they state that Columbus had complained to the queen of his disobedience and, when Pinzon expressed the wish to be allowed to reply to the charge by making an independent report, he received a bald intimation from the Court that he must appear in the train of Columbus, whose subordinate he was. This distressed him so much that he died soon afterwards. It may very well have happened so: the postponement of his revenge, to

make certain of it later on, was quite in accordance with the dark and vindictive humour of Columbus.

On September 24 the fleet, a haphazard company of ships and men, left Cadiz Harbour: on November 3, after fourteen days' sail, the islands of Dominica and Guadeloupe were sighted, but it was not until two weeks later that the expedition reached Española and the port of La Navidad, the settlement founded for the Spaniards who had been left behind.

The Admiral had a salute fired. No reply from the shore. The greeting remained unanswered, all was silence, not even a fire signal was visible. Columbus scented something wrong. Next morning emissaries of the cacique arrived bearing with them as gifts of welcome two golden masks, which they laid at the Admiral's feet, and then departed. In the evening, some members of Guacamari's household again appeared and announced with a downcast air that they would not come on board until they had spoken with the Admiral.

"Very well," was the reply: "there is the Admiral standing on the deck of his ship."

"Yes," said the Indios naively: "that may well be, but you kindle a torch so that we may see him." This was done; they recognised Columbus, climbed hesitatingly up the poop, and stood silent and fearful in the half-darkness.

"Where is your chief?" they were asked.

"He is sick," they replied.

"Sick?"

" He cannot walk; he has an injured leg." But they spoke in such a tone and in such a manner as though they were afraid and had a guilty conscience, for they kept looking at each other and none of them wished to be the first to speak.

" Where are our countrymen? " asked the Spaniards sternly. " Why is all so silent on shore? Where have they gone? Did they leave you no message? Has the cacique nothing to tell us about them? "

At last, driven into a corner by such questions, they told a story which it was clear they had carefully learnt by heart, and whose falsity they betrayed by their voluble chatter: a tribe from the South had landed from the island, surprised their town, and attacked the Spanish settlers, as a result of which some of them were killed, though the others were safe; in the course of the defence Guacamari had received a wound in the thigh which, to his regret, prevented him paying his respects to the Admiral.

All this was very suspicious and disquieting. If some of the Spaniards were still alive, why did they not show themselves? And yet it might be supposed that they had scarcely expected the return of their countrymen. On the following day ten or twelve sailors and a few gentlemen went on land, their leader being one who had made the first voyage and knew the ground. They found Guacamari's former dwelling lying in ashes and the huts

round it destroyed: not far away they came upon the wreck of the blockhouse which had served the settlers as a dwelling place, and then the so-called fort, whose palisades were torn down and upon whose charred fragments were lying human corpses. They searched further and discovered, hidden under shrubs and grass and, later on, in the Indios' huts, various effects belonging to the dead men; and there was no longer room for doubt that not one of the unhappy colonists was still alive and that all thirty-eight of them had been killed. But they could not obtain any explanation of what had happened, as the Indios would not budge from their tale of a surprise by another tribe. At last the Admiral decided to go and see the supposedly wounded Guacamari and call him to account. It is incredible that he should have waited so long, and yet the answer is at hand: anything unpleasant, anything that forced him to a decision, he always put off as long as he could; he had a positive horror of the irrevocable. He took the surgeon with him, and also Doctor Chanca, who served as physician on the Admiral's ship, and to whom we are indebted for a fairly exact account of the second voyage, a conscientious, dry chronicle that reveals a man of some education. They arrived and were greeted with much solemnity: the cacique was lying motionless, and merely contracted his face a little from time to time, as though he were mastering severe pain. Doctor Chanca took the bandage off

his thigh in accordance with the Admiral's wishes; not a sign of injury.

"Here is no wound," said the doctor; "you are as whole as we."

The chief shook his head with an enigmatic smile, as though a foreigner could not understand, and the medicine men raised a lamentable howl. A strange business: Columbus knew not what he should do; it was obvious that the whole story was a completely put-up affair, but he did not dare to deal with it accordingly; other tribes might be in the conspiracy, and he wanted to avoid having a whole country full of enemies against him; for the present, therefore, he would not acknowledge the outrage. And yet, if he gave in, what sort of impression would it produce on the noble companions to whom, for weeks and months past, he had been singing the praises of the natives' gentleness and innocence? They would pronounce him a fraud or laugh at him. He pretended to believe what he was told, agreed that the cacique was suffering from some secret injury, spoke to him in private, asked him whether he was really unable to walk, helped him up, gave him an arm, talked to him like an affectionate father, and finally invited him to come on board. Thus he met make-believe with make-believe, and the intention was to show the cacique something that should warn him that they were not so meanly provided as on their first arrival, and that they now had resources of which

they had previously given no idea. The display then started, and the first exhibit that Columbus showed his guest was fifty horses, which the Spaniards had brought across the sea. Amazement of the child of nature! Guacamari trembled in all his limbs and his brow became damp with sweat: he had never seen such monsters, which were beyond his world; not even in dreams had he surmised such creatures. The object was achieved: even if he had had a single thought of any evil design, this spectacle, which had the same effect on his followers as on himself—somewhat as though a man of to-day was suddenly dropped into a herd of Atlantosaurs (more so, for we learnt at school that such frightful creatures did once exist)—this spectacle would surely suffice to keep him submissive and peaceful.

The same day he dined with the Admiral and we are assured that his demeanour was so friendly and unconstrained that Columbus could no longer maintain the suspicion that he had taken any part in the murder of the thirty-eight colonists. Columbus is reported to have exclaimed that such a degree of dissimulation was impossible. But it happened that on the following night ten Indian women whom the Admiral had brought from the Caribbean Islands ("brought" is the word used in the narrative, a milder variant for "seized") escaped from the ship and, without awakening the watch, swam ashore. It appeared that Guacamari had promised

them his protection and even that he had induced them to escape, and, when the Admiral sent a few men on shore to demand them back, the cacique had abandoned the town and departed to the interior of the island with all his subjects and possessions. Could there be a clearer proof of guilt?

This incident, as characteristic of the Indian attitude of mind as of the guilelessness of the first conquerors in their dealings with them, is the prelude of a fateful historical process that ended in the bloody annihilation of an entire race.

Of the first visit to Guacamari, Doctor Chanca relates:

"We found him in his 'hanamac', which, by the custom of the country, was hung up in the open air; it consists of a fabric of cotton yarn, knitted like a net. As regards the manner and occasion of the murder of our countrymen, he merely repeated what we already knew and, when he had finished his story, presented the Admiral with eight and a half marks of fine gold, five to six hundred coloured stones, and a cap embroidered with stones of the same kind. Then, while still lying down, he expressed his condolences for the death of the Christians and shed many tears, as did his servants and relations."

Condolences, tears, and sobs: they had seen all this before when the *Santa Maria* was wrecked: they were incorrigible hypocrites—these much-belauded "innocent savages." So the Europeans

present could not help thinking, so others thought later on, and such would be the conclusion to-day. And yet there was something else involved, something that had no concern with paltry moral considerations, namely the so-called "tear-salutation", a very ancient Indian rite, which, so far as I know, Cabeza de Vaca, in a sixteenth-century book of travel describing his very remarkable experiences among the peoples of Florida and Texas, is the first to mention, and which was first recognised as a cultural phenomenon by a German explorer of our own day.

Columbus and his companions naturally drew the crudest conclusions. With arrogant self-sufficiency, they measured this strange world and still stranger life by their own narrow ideas of advantage and common use. If they could not make these fit, they saw nothing but insolence and savagery. They were seldom able to strike a balance in such matters; toleration and an attempt at understanding were almost entirely wanting, and their only effort in that direction, being without thought for, and interest in, the inner justification of a differently acquired attitude to existence, was an act of oppression: the conversion of the natives to Christianity. But the worst is yet to come. The worst was that from the very first moment they looked upon these creatures as their property and their spoil, and treated them as sportsmen treat wild creatures that have no master. Indeed, as I write down the com-

parison, I shrug my shoulders over it, for it is far too weak; beasts are preserved from wholesale slaughter, because they are useful and expected to propagate. What is the use of human beings?

Columbus, who had indulged himself a good deal with the idea that in the Indios he had discovered a kind of ideal people who, he began by believing, were destined to bring forgotten virtues into honour once again, must have been bitterly disappointed when it became obvious beyond question that these much-belauded creatures lay under the charge of a manifold and malignant murder. And, even if he had glorified them solely for propaganda purposes, it was hard for him to realise the truth. He could not change his opinion from one hour to the next: it was not like him to capitulate before a fact. As a result, he fell upon an idea that to a plain man seemed obvious enough, but in his case involved a complicated train of reasoning—namely, that the murdered men were not guiltless of a fate that they had done much to bring upon themselves. Marvellous discovery! From the moment that he began to judge matters from this standpoint, evidence began to accumulate, and justice really demanded that the true state of affairs should be published. Columbus was extremely careful not to do anything of the kind; he preferred to keep silence. It was too unpleasant, too painful, to confess in the presence of the pious Spanish world such dealings between Christian gentlemen and ignorant heathen; only

a few meagre indications betrayed the truth. This politic attitude was adopted by all who came with Columbus and all who came after him, with the exception of that passionate friend of the Indians, the priest Las Casas.

The incident was symptomatic, and not much insight is needed to guess the causes that led up to the murder of the thirty-eight colonists. The whole story is as clear as in a mirror. A rabble, without discipline or decency, and without the support of a social order; insolent and arrogant, they made it clear from the first that what they wanted they must have. They demanded food, they had to be served and set at ease, and, if they were not blindly obeyed, they resorted to force. What were these Indios in their eyes? Beasts,—good-natured, stupid beasts; to be treated as one pleased if only because they were not Christians. One could torment them, for they did not mind. They bowed and smiled and submitted. One need not trouble to boast of one's origin, one's religion, or one's weapons, for in their childlike faith they recognised these advantages humbly and without question. The Sons of Heaven are without fault: well, the Sons of Heaven must be paid for their position. They have been left to an uncertain fate at a dreadful distance from their home; the return of the Admiral is uncertain, the Admiral himself is an uncertain man; these wretched savages shall compensate them for the torture of waiting and

of isolation in this waste of waters. And the price that they demand is Gold. Though they were quite without any conception of the inhabitants of the country and its resources, their ideas were little less than prodigious. Thus had their leader taught them to think: in this they trusted him and followed his example. Every gesture, every look demanded gold—it was the meaning of their every word and every deed. Moreover, as time went on, a physical inconvenience began to make itself felt, one that burst forth into catastrophe and proved their undoing. They were without women. Yet it was not their intention to live like anchorites. Still less was it their pleasure to marry the women or treat for them in a proper manner—that would have meant demeaning themselves too far and giving away too much; they would have none of such dealings. What they needed they took by force, recking nothing of the protests and lamentations that followed. Why should these savages be considered? They were no better than cattle and should be thankful that their pretty women were thought worthy to share the bed of a European and a Catholic Christian, even though he might be an escaped convict. What were originally isolated acts of violence, secret outrages, gradually became common offences committed in the open light of day, and none felt any fear that these Indios, who, in spite of the insults heaped on them, continued to salute their masters politely and answer them with

friendliness, would ever seriously resort to arms. But the unexpected happened. The measure was full. Guacamari and his people lost the angelic patience which the Spanish ruffians had so carelessly abused. They were thousands, and the others only a few dozen, and the issue of the fight was not in doubt; and, if they utterly rooted out the foreign destroyers of the peace, it was not revenge, it was not retaliation, it was merely the infliction of a well-earned punishment.

The amazing thing is that they did not acknowledge what they had done. But it is possible, even probable, that the deed which, under the pressure of circumstances, was their only means of deliverance, seemed, when accomplished, an act of terrible presumption. Those that had been done to death were Sons of the Gods. All the injuries they had suffered could surely be no justification for this; they could hope for no pardon, and the terror with which they contemplated the return of the other heavenly ones, of the Admiral with his white-winged ships, must have plunged their dreams and thoughts into uttermost confusion and gloom. We can have no conception, nor the faintest inkling, of what they felt.

No contemporary historiographer or chronicler has been at the pains to write down an honest and unvarnished account of the unholy beginning of the colonisation of America; all have slid over them with a few meaningless phrases, as though one of

the certainly regrettable but unavoidable inconveniences of discovering new territory was the necessity of abolishing the property rights of the inhabitants, enslaving the men and youths, violating the women, dishonouring the girls, and cutting down in cold blood any one who made the slightest resistance.

When Alonzo de Ojeda and Diego de Nicuessa had the continent of Darien " conferred " upon them in the year 1509 by King Ferdinand, a territory which they were to share as governors, they issued a proclamation to the natives, which had been drawn up by the most eminent Spanish jurists and theologians and served as a valid formula for all subsequent seizures of property. It is too characteristic and informative to be passed over and, if one reflects that it was addressed to people who understood not one word of the language in which it was published, and that it was not considered necessary to translate it into their own language, it becomes abundantly clear that its purpose was to mask an act of violence by a piece of paper covered with scholastic lucubrations. There is no pretence of legality—anything that looks like it is contemptuous mockery.

The document begins some distance back with the creation of Adam and Eve, from both of whom all men are descended, and proceeds to assert that God appointed one man, by name St. Peter, as the Lord and Chief of all the human race, because during five

thousand years the successive generations of men have split into so many kingdoms and provinces that a single country could neither have contained nor supported them and, without a supreme Authority, there could have been no blessing on their works. On this potentate (the unsuspecting natives are assured) God has conferred the power to spread His dominion over all parts of the world and to rule over Christians, Moors, Jews, and Heathen. He bears the name of Pope, which means: Marvellous Great Father and Master.

"The Pope now ruling [I quote verbally] has entrusted this Oceanic land to His Catholic Majesty Hernando, together with all that is in it, as is expressly stated in certain documents that will be shown to you if you ask to see them. His Majesty is, accordingly, by virtue of this bestowal, King and Lord of your country. For this reason you are held and bound to obedience, and I ask and order you to take the necessary time and ponder deeply on what I have just told you, so that you may acknowledge the Church as Sovereign and Leader of the Universe, and St. Peter, called the Pope, in the rights that are his, and His Majesty as King, and that you show yourselves willing to be converted to our Holy Faith and instructed therein by the holy Fathers whom the Pope shall send to you. When you have received the Faith, follow it, and you will do well and fulfil your duty. Then His Majesty

and ourselves will welcome you with love and goodwill, you and your wives and children shall be free, and possess and enjoy what is yours. But if you refuse, or if you of evil intent withstand my admonitions, then at God's command I shall descend upon you in might, and wage terrible war upon you. I shall bend you beneath the yoke of the Church and of the King, I shall take away your wives and children and dispose of them as the King may desire. Moreover I shall take away your possessions and bring upon you all the evils that I can, as though you had been rebel subjects who refuse to show obedience to their rightful Lord. And I hereby proclaim that all the bloodshed and evil that may result from your obstinacy is accountable to you alone, and not to His Majesty, nor to me, nor to those who serve me. Wherefore is this Declaration and Requisition made, and I beg the notary present to enter the necessary endorsement hereabove."

It would indeed be difficult to disinter from the annals of history a document that was so complete a combination of fundamental falsity and candid extortion. It would be almost ridiculous to attempt to find another example of such an attitude; there has never been anything like it, not when the Mongolian hordes overran Europe, or the Roman legions broke into Gaul. No other religion, no other system, treated foreign faiths and forms with

such contempt, with so stony an intolerance, as Spanish-Catholic Christianity.

It needs a certain courage and a certain humility to recognise the past of the human race for what it really has been: an unbroken chain of injustice, fraud, theft, outrage, and murder. All this occurred only four hundred and odd years ago. I can imagine a state of mind that would lead me to the regretful conclusion that, with but few variations, it might all have happened yesterday.

What attitude did Columbus take in this matter? Did he mean to enslave the Indios, or was it only under external pressure that he found himself prepared to tolerate, assist, and even favour the process? Was it his considered intention from the very beginning, or did the plan originate in the brains of the traders and speculators who had him on leading strings? The question cannot be answered briefly in either sense, owing to the complex character of the man, which becomes more and more inscrutable the more one attempts to explore it. If I look upon him as the magnificent Don Quixote of history, as the proto-Don Quixote, so to speak, it is just his romantic conception of the Indios that turns him actually into the Knight of the Doleful Countenance. The tragi-comic scene in which the ingenious cavalier, exulting in the fray, rides among the herd of wethers and senselessly slaughters the terrified creatures, is also a central symbol for the Don Quixote of the Ocean. He did

not know whither he was riding nor against whom he was fighting: he could not see or understand. And when at last he understood, he fell for ever into an irredeemable melancholy which thenceforward hung over him like a mortal sickness.

When he recognised that the foundation of La Navidad had been a failure, owing to the damp climate and the poor harbour, he sought for a more favourable port, and one nearer the supposed gold mines of the interior. He chose the bay of Monte Christo, which abounded in fish, and there, in December, 1493, he began to build the first Spanish city in the New World, which he called the City of Queen Isabella. Its ruins are still to be seen to-day. The Indios, particularly the women, hospitable and eager to help, as they always were at the first encounter, brought in an abundance of foodstuffs from the fertile countryside, including yam roots, which the Europeans soon learned to prize very highly. More important was the still-unauthenticated news of the proximity of gold mines: it was stated that they were only a hundred kilometres away, in the territory of the chief, Caonabo, the same who was at feud with the coastal tribes and who, as Guacamari and his people alleged, had murdered the settlers of La Navidad. The Admiral sent an expedition into the district, and the emissaries returned in a high state of excitement: they swore that they had seen the glitter of gold in the valleys and rivers, and that there were mountains

of pure gold. Columbus wanted to test the truth of these reports for himself, and broke into the interior, accompanied by an armed force. The mountains of gold he does not seem to have found: but to make sure of them, in any event, he built Fort St. Tomas in the district of Cibao, which ultimately became an infamous haunt of murder.

From the end of the year difficulties began to accumulate and Columbus was not the man to overcome them with calm hand and cool head. He had, at that time, a permanent sense of injury, as though Fate had a personal grudge against him, and the solution that he did sometimes find was dictated by a feeling of despair and therefore questionable. An unknown sickness spread among the fleet—probably a tropical fever: he too was attacked by it and laid low until March of the next year. The stores for the crews and the gentlemen-adventurers began to dwindle in an alarming manner, and the Indios could not be forced to produce supplies in sufficient quantities. They had begun to show themselves refractory; in certain tribes there was a dangerous spirit abroad, and here and there occurred an actual outbreak of hostilities. Gold was obtained, or extorted, in much smaller quantities than had been expected—and it was no wonder that the indolent caballeros, who had crossed the sea with such exaggerated hopes, began to regret their credulity, grew dispirited and mutinous, and longed to get back to Spain as soon as possible, where no

one was so shameless as to ask them to work,—to do real work with spade and hammer and ploughshare. It was a crime against their honour, and as they were quite incapable of realising how matters stood, and merely hindered the proper development of the colony, the Admiral offered no objections to their return, and commissioned Admiral de Torres, captain of the *Marigalante*, to carry them to Spain on twelve ships.

The memorial he entrusted to De Torres to hand to their Majesties is noteworthy for the fact that it contains the first official discussion of the question whether the Indios are to be employed as slaves, and tries to make it plausible by all manner of crafty stipulations and Jesuitical euphemisms. Once more he expends much verbiage on extolling for their Majesties' benefit the rich yield that may be expected from the gold mines and gold washings. He says nothing of any satisfactory results; he only speaks of prospects. He cannot conceal the melancholy state of the colony and the members of the expedition; and he details the causes that have prevented him from sending an abundance of gold to his dear Mistress—the numerous epidemics of sickness, the difficulty of the work in the gold rivers, the lack of proper roads and transport: for the draught animals brought from Spain had grown miserably emaciated. Moreover, the European did not thrive if he could not get the articles of food to which he had become accustomed at home. In

this intention he had made several efforts to start plantations, but the labourers ceased work almost at once (he did not dare to admit the reason—he was afraid of the possible vengeance of the hidalgos). But the greatest lack of all was wine. The Spanish wine merchants had been required to provide so many hundred casks of wine for the fleet: had the supply been used up so quickly? By no means. The casks were defective and the greater part of the wine was lost during the voyage. It is noteworthy that even in those days war-contractors understood their business. On them the Admiral unloaded all his anger; there he did not need to hold his hand; he was familiar with things at Court, and knew how glad great personages were when their inferiors could be used as scapegoats. The original memorandum actually bears a note in the queen's handwriting, strictly enjoining Juan de Fonseca, lately appointed Colonial Minister, to discover as soon as possible who was responsible for the faulty wine casks, so that his property might be confiscated, and the man made liable for the damage.

"I need corn," writes the Admiral, "biscuit, bacon, smoked meat, raisins, sugar, honey, and asses both male and female. And horses,—send me horses; they are as indispensable for fighting as for the peaceful cultivation of the land." Here was some more fraudulent dealing. The horses that had been shown to him had not been shipped, but far inferior ones. Who had got the profit out of this?

Plainly Juan de Soria, who was his enemy; he must have changed the animals. The regular cavalrymen, it was true, had first-rate horses, but their masters were lying ill and would not allow their beasts to be used for work at any price. A sorry leader, truly, who complains of his servants' insubordination. But the Viceroy of the New World is not yet at the end of his list of needs: he wants shoes, leather, shirts, linen, preserved fruits, fifty casks of syrup, a hundred arquebuses, a hundred chests of powder. And above all, men,—industrious, orderly men; he cannot get started with those now with him: masons were much needed, miners and gold washers. In a word, he was short of everything, and he had no means of supplying his needs in this strange world whose resources he did not know and of whose possibilities he had no idea.

Or was the request for men merely an astute preparation for the real project that possessed his mind? "Why should we send you men?" they might very easily answer him. "You have quite enough over there—hundreds of thousands are at your disposal; train them and turn them into useful instruments of your enterprise." Columbus had no thoughts of any civilising mission, he wanted to turn the natives into trade goods so that their bodies might enrich the State Treasury: and as they did not bring in as much gold as might reasonably have been expected from them, they were to give their labour in the place of gold. The discoverer of

the New World argued somewhat pharisaically as follows: "Your Majesties rightly desire that we should instruct the Indios in our Holy Faith, but we do not understand their language, and I am sending to Spain with Señor de Torres a number of men, women, boys, and girls, whom I beg Your Majesties to place in charge of such persons who may provide them with the best instruction and train them in various kinds of labour. According as they conduct themselves, they could then be advanced in rank over the rest of the slaves, and such rivalry would spur them on to progress. As the Cannibal Islands are the largest and most populous of all, it seems advisable to send some of their inhabitants to Castile so that they may as soon as possible be rid of their barbarous custom of devouring human flesh. The sooner they learn the Spanish tongue the sooner will they be baptised, and the sooner will the salvation of their souls be made secure."

At this point, however, an incidental observation is necessary. The charge of cannibalism (a word, by the way, that is taken from the transliteration of an Indian island, Kariba) is, as touching the West Indian archipelago, totally unfounded. Whether the custom existed on the Central American continent is uncertain, and has often been disputed. The human sacrifices associated with the religious cult that assumed among the Aztecs forms of revolting cruelty, and had developed into something like mystic-erotic blood-feasts, may have produced in

the overheated imaginations of the first conquerors the dreadful impression of cannibalism, and it may be premised almost with certainty that Columbus had no other proof than the merest rumour and hearsay. It is no use trying to discover whether he believed the accusation or not, and no doubt he hardly reflected that from the moral point of view there is no important difference between handling human flesh and eating it. His idea—and it was the idea of a crafty peasant—was this: "I must represent the Indios as innocently godless and innocently depraved, and then my proposal to enslave them will be accounted to me as a virtue, or at any rate an educational measure for their betterment." A truly European bit of hypocrisy: commercial aims enveloped in windy phrases about humanity and progress.

His subsequent observations leave nothing to be desired in the way of clarity. "For the salvation of the souls of these natives it is our idea that the farther we can remove them from their country, the better it will be, and the following suggestion is put forward for Your Highnesses' service. As the need here of cattle and beasts of burden is very great, Your Majesties might provide a number of caravels to supply us with some herds every year. They could then be bought at a reasonable price from the importers and paid for with Indian slaves, for though they are savages they are capable, intelligent, and well-proportioned men, and will be found

more useful than all other slaves. As soon as they have lost sight of their homes they will get used to their fate. They can be used to row the galleys, which they understand very well how to do, and Your Majesties could place an import tax on them."

This sounds very modern: the Admiral was undoubtedly a man of financial talent. He knew how to look ahead, and his chief concern was how to make the colony profitable to the motherland.

It was perhaps this appearance of commercial astuteness that led some of the later historians, particularly in Spain, to assert that Columbus was of Jewish origin. And that this may not appear a mere assumption, they produce some evidence from mediæval sources, which, however, are so inaccessible that it is not possible to test their validity. But many writers arrive at this conclusion from a kind of general conviction alone, whether on sympathetic grounds or the reverse, it is not always possible to say. There is, indeed, something disturbing about the hypothesis, and it throws a light on one side of the man that had hitherto been obscure. In point of fact, there is a good deal of the renegade in this Christobal Colón; he has many traits of the eager apostate who is nervously anxious to cover up the paths that he has trodden. He is always the neophyte who, with what to unsympathetic eyes seems like deliberation, and with a fervour that he feels must deceive himself as well as his

surrounding world, transgresses all the limits of taste, good sense, and reason. And if we approach quite near to the soul of this discoverer of a world and listen, we sense betrayal, though not indeed a very definable form of it; we feel the presence of a traitor—one whom fate has driven to high achievements precisely because it has made him traitorous. A certain soft-heartedness in Columbus is a Jewish trait, in the best and the worst sense of that adjective: Jewish, too, is his unmistakable inclination to find a sentimental solution for practical problems: Jewish, likewise, is his characteristic timidity in the face of far-reaching responsibilities—a timidity that springs from age-long fear of the irrevocable and of what has been decided from above. But what is *not* Jewish is his striking want of intelligence and practical capacity, and, above all, that form of Don-Quixotry that consists in subjecting the mind to the dream of a perverted reality—a trait completely foreign to the Jewish character.

The Spanish royalties, to their honour be it said, did not approve their Admiral's proposal: there is a marginal note—"not sanctioned, a further suggestion awaited." It was no doubt mainly the queen who opposed such a seizure and sale of human beings as a State concession, lucrative as the trade might be according to Columbus' description. But in such circumstances, the automatism of facts is stronger even than the conscien-

tious scruples of an absolute monarch. Beset by the all-pervading lust for gold, which had now become almost a mania, Columbus found means of staving off the impatient enquirers by the provision of cheap labour. When Antonio de Torres returned to Española with four caravels, the Admiral had five hundred Indios of both sexes put on board, on the ground that they were rebels, and transported to Spain. At Seville they were handed over to Juan de Fonseca, who sent them to his estate, where they were exposed and sold by auction as slaves. Bad treatment, overwork, the change of climate, the unaccustomed and degrading way of life so affected them that they all soon died. There was no protest, not a human voice was raised; the experiment proved the commencement of a settled policy, and the *Atelantado* Bartholomé, the Admiral's energetic and competent brother, soon sent one ship after another to Spain full to the hatches with Indian slaves—an utterly aimless and futile proceeding, as all these poor creatures, thus torn from their homes, came to the same sad end as the first consignment.

At the time of its discovery the island of Española had a population of roughly three and a half millions. Ten years later there were only thirty-four thousand left,—scarcely one-hundredth part. The carnage began and proceeded under the seeing-unseeing eyes of Columbus, and whether he felt any grief over this holocaust, or whether, in his dark

fatalism and stony isolation of soul, he regarded the process as an inexorable law, is not to be discovered in any chronicle. The truth must be sought, if anywhere, in the man's own heart.

CHAPTER X

The Truth Behind It All

An incident is recorded which reveals, with all the appositeness of a parable, how the Indios, more and more shaken in their faith in the strangers, tried to convince themselves that these heaven-descended personages were not immortal, as they had at first supposed. The garrison of Fort San Tomas, in command of which Columbus had placed a nobleman called Pedro Margarite, treated the natives with a ruthless brutality that recognised no human rights, and gradually became the callous custom among the licentious hordes that Spain let loose over the New World like a devouring plague. They robbed the Indios of their gold ornaments, they emptied their granaries, they seized and raped their wives and daughters, and, indeed, brutality became a policy. The cacique Caonabo, who ruled the *Vega Real* in which the fort was situated, was a resolute and a brave man; he collected the men of his tribe and freed them from the fetters of their subjection. To prove to them that the strangers possessed no sort of supernatural powers, as they feared, and that the pretended Sons of Heaven were as subject to death as they were themselves, he

arranged a test which they should see with their own eyes. The Spaniards were accustomed to use one or more Indios to carry them across the ford of the river that lay between the fort and the plain. One day when the river had been swollen by rains and a member of the chivalry of Spain was none the less waiting to be carried to the opposite bank, the cacique ordered the bearers to see whether they could not manage to drown their heavenly guest. When they reached the middle of the river they let the Spaniard slip from their shoulders and held him fast under water until he ceased to stir. Then they carried him to the bank, where the entire population of the village sat round the corpse and waited to see whether he would wake. They sat round the dead man for three days, and not until the body began to decay were they convinced that the supposed god was but a mortal man. The certainty of this freed them from the terror that had paralysed them, and the news of the marvellous event was joyfully spread from tribe to tribe.

Weak and irresolute characters let themselves be easily drawn into precipitate action. If they have omitted to act with decision at the right moment, they try to repair their error by excessive rigour and, if they have been too tolerant and easy-going upon the wrong occasion, they enormously increase their difficulties by acting ruthlessly when ruthlessness is out of place.

In the written instructions given by the Admiral

to Pedro Margarite, the main injunction is that the Indios are to suffer no harm, that nothing whatever is to be done to them against their will, but that, on the contrary, they are to be treated with every possible consideration. This sounds as if it was so intended, but it was not; shortly afterwards comes the following passage:

"As the natives have practised theft upon us, I enjoin you to cut off the nose and ears of any you may catch in the act, for these are members that cannot be hid. In this way, you shall establish a proper system of barter with them, for thus they will all understand that we shall return good for good and evil for evil."

After asserting with much hypocritical rhetoric that he, like the queen, is much more concerned that the natives shall become Christians than with any treasures that can be obtained from them, he unfolds to his subordinate an extraordinarily insidious plan for seizing the dreaded Caonabo. "He must be induced to pay you a visit," advises the Admiral. "As he goes naked, it is difficult to lay hold of him, and if he once slips away, owing to the lie of the land it will be not a little hard to apprehend him: you must therefore offer him a shirt and a cloak, a girdle to put round it, and a cap to wear, and thus you may easily seize him. If he will not come to you, then you must so arrange that you may go to

him. One of your men must be sent to say that you wish to see him and come to a friendly understanding with him."

All this is as remote from honesty and chivalry as—well, almost as remote as Spanish Christianity is from Indian heathendom, and no two things could be more remote than these, at least in this special instance, for it must be borne in mind that the relation of Christians toward heathen, Turks, and Jews is one of complete and irremediable outlawry, —they may be treated like material objects, or like noxious beasts. Words are wickedly accommodating things. "See to it," Columbus warns his officers, "that justice is respected." How? Through the cutting off of noses and ears, and the three hundred and forty gallows erected by the carpenters on the *Vega Real*. "You shall put up crosses," writes the Admiral in conclusion (no doubt they were to serve as gallows) "on all roads and pathways, for as (God be praised) this land belongs to Christians, the remembrance of it must be preserved for all time."

He was not mistaken: the remembrance was indeed preserved. And one of the means that contributed to that end was the bloodhound. It is not possible to establish with historical exactness the moment when these useful animals first entered upon their activities. Let us pause for a moment to get our breath. The staghound and bloodhound, *perro cosso*, were let loose for the more convenient

slaughter of the Indian "game", when the Indios took to flight. They leapt with eager fury on the backs of the flying savages, pulled them down, and tore them to pieces. In this way the sport gained in attractiveness, and the terror of the hunted creatures was so intensified that the last remains of their resistance broke down. The usefulness of these animals having been thus established, the Admiral did not hesitate to import numerous couples of these beasts from Spain, and some of them, notably the dog Berçerrico, won a dreadful reputation for their deeds of slaughter, and became the ancestors of a breed credited with special skill in tracking down the Indios and tearing them to pieces, and hence they fetched very high prices. "See to it that justice is respected."

But when Don Quixote becomes cruel he ceases to be Don Quixote. He can be one or the other, but not both. Or does not Don Quixote's left hand know what his right hand is doing? Is his soul in such a state of tension, his spirit so entangled in his fixed idea, that he loses the measure of things near at hand, and what is small becomes great in his eyes, and what is good, evil, and vice versa? Is this the influence and the effect of Sancho Panza? For Sancho Panza is always at his side—without him he is not imaginable, and Sancho Panza is an astute and experienced man of the world who understands his business. The original type is, certainly, a good-humoured, ingenuous creature who could

not hurt a fly: but he changes as the years pass, he is moulded by the ages, circumstances reveal him as possessed of unsuspected talents. The world is full of Sancho Panzas; they are found in all centuries, in all professions and ranks of life, and in all epochs. Wherever fate bestows him, and whatever form he assumes—a peasant, a mercenary soldier, a small tradesman, a vagabond, a courtier, an official, or an old veteran, he always knows how to make use of the weaknesses of whatever Don Quixote he elects to follow. For though Don Quixote has no reality himself, he tolerates men of realities and facts, men of gains and profits, and while he regards them as his creatures, they treat him as they please; all they need to do is to set him firmly in his folly and feed his fancies.

It is a thankless and for the most part a futile task to test events for what may be called their chemically pure content of truth, when those events belong to a far-distant past. Just as buildings collapse in wreckage and ruin, so what remains of events is a crude shell, which, at the most, gives some idea of dimensions and proportions, but little indication of what was living, creative, and time-conditioned in the form itself. That can only be established by comparison and intuition and by the consequences that followed after it. Even harder is it to disentangle a human figure from the past; his true aspect is lost behind all manner of hearsay, encrusted with similarities, obscured by capricious

inventions and distortions, misunderstanding, and anecdotage. Over-illumination alternates with impenetrable darkness; what is truly characteristic melts away, and all the casual traits of daily life are crudely combined to create a scene and a character. It is troublesome enough to get to know a human being who lives with us and at our side—he has but to do something unexpected for once, and we have to revise our entire judgment of him: indeed to live among human beings means nothing less than a constant revision of one's judgments. In the case of an historical personage, especially one so distinguished as Columbus, he must, if the truth is to be found, be re-created from the inner vision.

Columbus was unquestionably in the hands of his creatures. He was at fault from the very first and step by step fell into deeper fault. Only very strong personalities, whose behaviour flows directly from their nature, can evade the continual pressure exercised by their environment on their will. Columbus' fate was that he had to present a figure whose characteristics he did not possess. He was a fantastic enthusiast and found himself obliged to become a commander, a ruler, and an administrator. His world was the world of dream and illusion; perhaps he even had the gift of self-hypnotism,—for he was certainly able to intensify his perceptions; and yet he was called to a position (for which he believed himself specially chosen) where

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

After an engraving by George E. Perine from a copy of the painting by Parmigiano in the Royal Gallery at Naples

he had to master a hard, dangerous, and prosaic reality. In order not to fail lamentably, he was forced to assume the character that he wished to appear, and if a rôle is only played and not lived, it must be exaggerated and distorted. All the rest follows inevitably: he falls for the flatterer and will not see the other side of him although he knows it: he can refuse nothing to the greedy, he dare not bring the transgressor to justice, and only acts with decision when he need not tremble for his position and his dignity, which in all the darkness of his destiny he inwardly knows suit him ill, because he is not fit to bear them. He trembles to find every act producing such merciless consequences, his earlier life in the world of the imagination was much less narrowly confined; he feels his foothold suddenly giving way and he, whose only desire is to keep steady and maintain himself, grasps at supports that give way beneath him, and at men who treacherously push him down. It has almost the effect of poetic inspiration (Shakespeare has embodied something of the kind in the contrast of Hamlet and Horatio, and Fate is, after all, an even greater poet than Shakespeare) when Columbus, in taking his brother, Bartholomé, on the second voyage and appointing him governor, set at his side a man so utterly his complement and contrast, a man who, in a certain sense fulfilled him and showed up his defects. For Bartholomé Colón had a heavy fist, and an iron and unshakeable will—he

was indeed exactly what Christopher Columbus should have been to master that turbulent world into which this poor knight-errant had been driven. But Bartholomé's most ruthless, even horrible attempts to subdue the disorder, only threw a more lurid light on the other's weakness, and exposed them both to the hatred of the Spaniards. No one ever had a good word for the " Foreigner ", the fugitive Italian whom the favour of chance had crowned with unmerited laurels, and all, from the humblest gold digger to Bishop Fonseca and King Ferdinand, were united in the desire and purpose to hurl him back into the obscurity whence he had come.

He only needs to rouse himself and turn his back on the sultry atmosphere where ambition, avarice, disillusion, and debauchery burst all bonds, and he is once more the roving seafarer, the adept, full of faith in myths and wonders, still seeking the isle of Zipangu and the Empire of the Great Cham. There is a record of a scene, unmatchable in its own way, paradoxical and comic, which mirrors him clearly as a man who took no heed of actual facts and circumstances, but adapted them to his desires and his preconceived ideas.

After he had taken the necessary measures for the security of Española, and created a deceptive state of calm, in April of '94 he set sail with a few light caravels on a further voyage of discovery, and in search of the eastern shore of Asia. Not the slight-

est doubt ever crossed his mind that the lands with which he had become acquainted until then could be other than parts of India. When others ventured even to question the probability of this, he angrily waved them aside and regarded the suggestion as an offence and an insult to himself. So he proceeded along the southern coast of Cuba: he met with a friendly reception everywhere, and in accordance with his usual custom he distributed bells and gay stuffs among the natives in return for the supplies which they brought. Enquiries for gold were vain: the Indios of those parts knew it well enough, but there was little of it to be seen among them, and when asked whence they had got it, they always pointed to the south, an instinctive method of getting rid of the strangers, of whom they had already heard dreadful rumours. Whereupon Columbus turned southwards and at the beginning of May discovered the island of Jamaica (Fanahica in the Indian tongue), the loveliest in all the archipelago, a veritable land of magic. But what did these knights and captains care for those magnificent primeval woods, the fascinating flora of an inviolate land? Their minds were set on one thing and one alone, and that was gold: and as they saw no possibility of getting any appreciable quantity of gold, they refused to pursue this unprofitable journey, and the Admiral, who had learnt the trick of concealing his cowardly acquiescence under a mask of independence, hurried back to Cuba.

Northwest of Cape Santa Cruz he came upon a labyrinth of beautiful little islands to which he gave the name " The Queen's Garden ", and he learned from certain Indian fishermen that about evening he would reach a land called Magon inhabited by men with tails. This was the first definite intimation of the mysterious Maya people, whose supposed appendages were none other than the feathered ornaments that hung down their backs, commonly worn by this race. But Columbus, more obsessed than ever by Marco Polo's and John Mandeville's descriptions of Asia, firmly and obstinately believed that the Asiatic land of Mangi was meant, and was strengthened in his view that Cuba was the continent of Asia by the statement of a chief that he could not reach the end of the Cuba coast, even if he had seen forty moons wax and wane. In joyful expectation Columbus pursued his voyage along the west coast of Cuba, and as the crew began to grow refractory, and demanded with threats that the ships should be turned back, he promised that, if they would hold out, they would in a few days reach the Chersonesus Aurea of Ptolemy, and thence, passing the estuary of the Ganges, arrive in the Red Sea : from there the shortest way home would be to go to Jerusalem by land, take ship again at Joppa, and so cross the Mediterranean. His promises and protestations were in vain, the insubordination of his followers grew more ominous every day, the supplies were growing alarm-

ingly short, and the ships, which had been attacked by the borer worm, were in a parlous state. The Admiral accordingly summoned a general council: he collected the boatswains, quartermasters, pilots, and map draughtsmen, and asked them to express their opinion and say whether they, like himself, were convinced that they had found the Indian coast, whence they could reach Spain on dry land. The men knew whom they had before them and what depended on their assent, and they all announced with one voice that what the Admiral believed they believed also. Whereupon Columbus, in order to provide himself with documentary evidence of this, had a formal protocol drawn up to the effect that he had reached the continent of India. This singular document repays examination.

The notary begins by describing the situation of the little fleet and enlarges upon the grounds which necessarily brought the Admiral to the conclusion that Cuba was a part of the Asiatic continent. It is really laughable to observe how he twists and turns to make the hypothesis clear. "No other conclusion was possible," he says, "as there are no inhabitants on the coast in these parts, with the exception of some naked folk who live by catching fish, never go into the interior, know nothing of the world, have never been above four hours' distance from home, and think there is nothing in the world but islands,—people without law and religion, who are merely born and die. Wherefore, to prevent any

man, when our journey is finished, from spreading evil calumnies, and maliciously decrying what is deserving of all praise, the Admiral charged me personally, together with sure witnesses, to visit each one of the two ships and openly ask the master, the crew, and every person on board whether they had the slightest doubt that this was the continent at the beginning and the end of India, whence Spain could be reached on foot. If anyone had any doubt, or any other information, he was to inform me so that I might deal with his doubt or his error. Thus did I, and openly questioned all the people there assembled, and told them of the fine of ten thousand *maravedis* if anyone should ever deny what he now said, his tongue to be cut out likewise, and were he a ship's boy or such-like inferior person he should receive a hundred lashes and have his tongue cut out as well."

The text was as follows: "I, X.Y., native of Z., pilot, or seaman, or master, state upon my oath that I have never heard of or seen an island with a coast line reaching for 335 sea miles from west to east, for this is manifest impossibility. As I see that the land extends as far as above stated to the south-west, I doubt not that it is a continent and not an island, and that if we sailed further along the said coast we should shortly reach a land where men of wisdom, who know the world, buy and sell."

This crazy formula Columbus caused to be repeated aloud by all the eighty persons who accom-

panied him on the expedition, after which they had to sign the protocol. A more Don-Quixotic outrage upon truth can hardly be conceived, for as a contemporary scornfully remarks, with some slight exaggeration, it only needed one of the crew to climb up the mast-head while the protocol was being signed to discover that Cuba was an island, and if those geographers are right who place the scene of this lunatic performance in the Gulf of Batabano, only forty-eight hours' sail would have been enough to bring Columbus to the extremity of the island. But of course he wanted no such demonstration; did not Don Quixote regard his squire's assertion that the tavern was not a knight's castle, but a tavern, as an ill-timed, irritating, and contemptible impertinence? The Admiral was so set upon the establishment of the famous document that after the death of the notary, Perez de Lima, shortly upon their return to the city of Isabella, he sent for Penalosa, the clerk to the Exchequer, and had the protocol attested once again.

Just about this time it was reported that ancient gold diggings had been discovered in the river Hayna. Columbus was greatly excited. He visited the place, walked about for a while in thought, and then announced with singular emphasis that these workings were the mines from which Solomon obtained the gold for the temple of Jerusalem, which clearly shewed that the island of Española was the Ophir of the ancients. This

was no fancy, no passing conceit, but a categorical thesis for which he contended with fanatic conviction until his last hour, without the smallest consideration of the geographical and physical impossibilities involved.

Very different from his first experience was the welcome he received when he again returned to Spain—and he noticed it with grieved astonishment. Where was the enthusiasm, all the joyous frenzy of that time? No kerchiefs were waved, no carpets hung down from the houses, no friends came to offer him their greetings; all was cold and silent. Why? There is always something mysterious about a revulsion of public feeling. He again sent his report to the queen: day after day went by, she did not answer. Instead of hurrying to the Court and there facing the intrigues of his enemies, among whom, it may be mentioned, Bishop Fonseca had worked successfully against him, he lurked in convents and shrines, on his knees before mouldering relics; for he had a vow to fulfil. He went about in a penitent's garb of haircloth with the rough surface against his body, and let his beard grow like a Franciscan. Those who knew him were shocked at his appearance and demeanour: he was depressed in mind, his eyes shone with a disquieting dark glow, his body was dreadfully emaciated, sickness and hardship had exhausted his strength. When the queen regent sent him a gracious but somewhat curt answer, a prolonged search had to be made for

him. He was engaged in pious conversations at La Rabida with Juan Perez and Antonio de Marchena. He read the royal letter commanding him to the Court. Yes, he would go, but with due pomp and display. So, very inappropriately, he fitted out a triumphal procession on the model of the first, but this time the world regarded it as meaningless ostentation. And yet, in his view, nothing had altered; he was the same and his achievement remained. India was still India. He forgot (because he would not know) that the men who had come home with him were ragged beggars slinking through the alleyways of Cadiz and Seville: most of them, worn out by fever, looked like ghosts. Not, in any case, a very encouraging advertisement. A good deal of stir was made of the fact that the proud cacique Caonabo was to be exhibited to the Spanish people as a hero conquered in battle (it was not, of course, mentioned that he had been caught by treachery): but Caonabo had died of grief and homesickness during the voyage home. There still remained the alleged Amazons who were captured on Guadelupe and whom the Admiral had so designated in recollection of his readings of Marco Polo: alas, these wretched females looked like starved beasts in their cage. But what of the sorely longed-for gold—the promised millions? What indeed! Every one was disillusioned to the point of apathy, and accepted the Admiral's persistent promises with a scepticism that bordered on the offensive. He did not realise

his false position and abruptly demanded eight ships for a third voyage. The reply was evasive; it was indicated to him that he must wait. Wait?—And for what? Was he perchance expected to hang about antechambers, he, Viceroy of the Oceanic Empire—how dared they suggest such a thing? But he was answered with shrugs of the shoulders. Ferdinand's toadies had for the moment the upper hand, Isabella seemed to have forgotten her faithful sea captain. Her daughter, Joanna, was on the point of marrying the Archduke Philip of Austria: France was casting a jealous eye upon the alliance, and Spain had to be prepared for war. The Infanta's dowry and the wedding festivities had exhausted all the queen's resources—she could not even pay the Court contractors, and the Jews, from whom a loan might have been raised, were now no more. She had probably based some hopes on the arrival of her Grand Admiral: but instead of laying at his mistress' feet the boundless treasures of which he had so often boasted in his letters and in his talk, ("The Kings of the East brought no more costly treasures to Bethlehem"—such were his magnificent words), he had nothing to offer but complaints and lamentations. Very well, he should have his ships (so the head of the opposition party intimated), but only on condition that he would on his side show some disposition to compromise, and give up one or other of his privileges, *e.g.*, the eighth part of the revenues and profits. Ah, he could see

the king's hand in this—always his inveterate opponent. No; his refusal was obdurate. What had been set down in writing and attested cannot be bartered away. At last, with much trouble and difficulty, he managed to obtain a promise that two caravels, which he had promised his brother Bartholomé, should be sent in the meantime to Española, and, to prevent him becoming utterly discouraged, his noble patrons and friends made it their business to obtain for him an order on the State Treasury for a sum of over six million *maravedis*. It was not of much service to him, for the Exchequer was, as usual, empty, but it was at least an open credit, and he could set about his preparations: and he also could pay his creditors in paper.

All this was bitter and galling, but a man could set his teeth and endure—he had been through worse than this: but the worst was to come. He became an object of ridicule. Captain Pedro Alonzo Niño, sent by Bartholomé, landed in Cadiz, and having been trained in the Admiral's school of magniloquence, he sent word that he had so heavy a cargo of gold on board that he thanked God the ship had not gone down. Columbus was overjoyed, and without satisfying himself whether the story were true or not, he forthwith wrote to their Majesties that a fleet laden with the boundless treasures of the Land of Ophir had arrived in Cadiz harbour. The royal pair, although the message did not sound altogether credible, evinced the liveliest

satisfaction, and gave him to understand that he could meet the costs of fitting out his expedition from the Indian gold, and return the credit for six million maravedis: which was done. But what was the result? The " treasures of the fleet from Ophir ", *i.e.* a few derelict galleys, consisted of a hundred and fifty Indios, the sale of whom was to produce the gold in question. A shattering disclosure. Not only had he to withdraw the report, but also undergo the further humiliation of communicating to the queen Bartholomé's lengthy account of the desperate and disordered conditions in the colony. When he again asked for the credit of six millions he was curtly told that no further steps could be taken in the matter.

These were merely stages in his downfall. It might well have been supposed that such a succession of disasters would have been enough to drive him mad, or sapped his feeling of self-importance. Far from it. He simply escaped from the world of existence into that of appearance. In order that his descendants might be secured in their inheritance of his rank and title, just about this time—before his third voyage—he asked the queen's consent for the creation of an entail, though the only tangible embodiment of this provision was no more than a chest filled with pious relics and Indian ornaments. His estate on Española, about a hundred and twenty-five miles long by sixty broad, had no real value: it was partly unexplored and partly pri-

meval forest and marsh land, and he could with the same intention have appropriated to his own use a territory as large as Spain, and no one would have grudged it him. When, later on, he requested that no Spanish captain other than himself should have the right to explore the Indian Sea, the Crown actually granted him this foolish and indefensible privilege. King Ferdinand probably agreed to this idiotic stipulation because he did not from the very outset regard himself as bound to make good the Admiral's exorbitant claims: the breaking of promises was to him a small matter that did not burden his conscience, and the queen, who still clung to the marvellous man with some vestiges of sympathy, reflected—as any sensible person must inevitably have done—that such an undertaking was unreal and impracticable, that several million square kilometres of ocean could not be placed under permanent police supervision. But reason and reflection had never been her protégé's strong points, and whether a project was practicable was a question that never entered the Admiral's mind.

CHAPTER XI

"In Chains"

In the meantime the colonies and all the enterprises connected therewith had fallen upon such an evil reputation that no honourable man was willing to seek a dubious fortune in "India." The same expedient had to be adopted as at the time of the first voyage and the prison doors were thrown open for the Admiral's benefit. Once more he had to make his choice among bandits and thieves, and he knew what he had to expect from such a company: moreover, a general pardon was issued to all evildoers who had evaded punishment by flight. If they declared themselves ready to cross the ocean, they were to be free and absolved from all penalty; only those guilty of heresy, high treason, arson, *lèse-majesté*, coining, and sodomy were not to share in the amnesty. Those who offered themselves for service were, it need hardly be said, a sorry crew; and their Majesties and their spiritual advisers expected, in all seriousness, this scurf of European humanity "to apply themselves more especially to the conversion of the Indios to the Catholic Faith."

Columbus could not resist, and, indeed, it would

have been foolish to do so. He had neither the People, nor the Court, nor the Church on his side. By the efforts of Bishop Fonseca and his favourites, among whom one of the busiest was Antonio de Torres, who owed everything to the Admiral, he, and all he stood for, had fallen into hopeless discredit. Their purpose was to embroil him with his officials and isolate him socially. Every possible obstacle was put in his way; he was forced to use intrigue, extortion, or some underhand means to achieve his purpose. His departure was put off from day to day and week to week, the main cause being that a fixed price had been laid down for the Admiral's purchases of foodstuffs, which made them unprocurable, as no dealer was willing to deliver his goods at the official price. Moreover, he was short of ready money: if he asked for any addition to the pitiful sums allowed him, he was contemptuously told he could coin money in India. At the last hour the royal paymaster Ximeno de Breviasca, a baptised Jew, came to him, and asked in an offensive manner for a statement of his purchases, and when Columbus refused it, threatened to delay still further a departure that his intrigues had already delayed so long. Whereupon the Admiral seized him, shook him, kicked him off the ship, and shouted that if this receipt were not enough, he could have an even more explicit one. It was the outburst of a weak man driven to despair, and what is admired or passed over in the strong man is never

forgiven to the weak one. This incident, which was reported to the Court in exaggerated terms, caused great annoyance there and prepared the way for the machinations that brought Columbus to ruin.

At last the ships were able to leave port. Many of the convicts, who constituted the crews, were not released from their irons until the fleet had reached the open sea, and if Columbus might now be thankful that he had left the hated Europe and its hateful inhabitants once more behind him, he must, too, have turned his eyes away from a spectacle that would naturally fill him with fear and apprehension for himself, his destiny, and the task that lay before him.

Why did he go on? What was the cause of this profound unrest? What was it that drove him again and yet again beyond the sea? Was it the fact that it was *his* world, his very own, a world that he had found? Or was he one of those so tragically deceived by destiny who do not recognise their object when they grasp it in their hands? We may not credit him with more perception than the age admitted, and what was instinct in him ceased to be effective as soon as he personally was concerned. He was a figure without mercy: he knew nothing of inward peace: the mighty deed he had accomplished had marked him, as a murderer is marked by his guilt. Blindly he sailed the seas and trod inviolate lands, ever thinking of something

other than what the hour demanded, helpless before a present necessity, knowing no human face, master of no human heart, buried in his own dark self, a joyless exile.

On the island of Cuba he had made his men swear solemnly that they were on the mainland, and when, in July, 1498, he first set foot on the American continent at Tierra di Gracia, he reversed the process of self-deception and announced that the land was an island. Since he had begun his transatlantic journeys, it had been his longing and his secret endeavour to find Paradise, the abode of the first human pair. His astrological and magical studies had convinced him that the site must be on an island in the Indian Sea; but this was purely a theological construction, quite unsupported by any evidence of fact or legend. Scarcely had he landed there, on the coast of Paria, than he announced that it was the Paradise of the Old Testament and no subsequent objection was ever able to shake his faith. He went no further,—he did not dare; moreover, Paradise lay at the top of a lofty mountain; but this very circumstance, combined with the sweetness of the air and the luxuriant surrounding vegetation, confirmed him in his conviction.

"The Earth is not round;" he writes in his report, "there is a sensible protuberance at the point where India joins the Ocean at the Equator. When Our Lord God created the sun, it stood ready

to rise at the highest point of the earth in the furthest East. And this highest point, as being the nearest to Heaven, must also be the most excellent spot on earth. Although Aristotle maintains that the South Pole is the highest point, and other learned men assure us that it is the North Pole, my view, on the contrary, is that the highest point is the Equator. This has occurred to no one before, which does not surprise me, since before Your Majesties ordered these lands and seas to be explored, very little was known about their conformation."

A farrago of nonsense, of course; but he will not let the subject go. He follows up his thoughts with lunatic consistency. "Paradise is situated in a place which no one can reach, except by the Divine consent. It has the form of a mountain, or rather it lies upon a mountain-top that resembles the thin end of a pear, or a ball topped with the nipple of a female breast; the earth swells up into this nipple and approaches Heaven. These are the sure signs of Paradise, which agree exactly with the descriptions given us by the saints and learned theologians." The phenomenon that the Orinoco displaces the salt water far out into the ocean gives him much food for reflection: the only explanation that he can find is that the river comes from Paradise and thus possesses supernatural characteristics. "When I had left the estuary," he writes, "the current was so strong that, with a moderate wind,

I covered sixty-five miles from early Mass to evening prayer, whence it appears that in sailing southward one goes uphill, and northward, downhill."

It appears much more clearly, in my opinion, from the final sequel, that he was not capable of registering an experience or referring an observation back to its natural causes. A peculiar light is thrown on his exaggerated state of exaltation as a result of his discovery of the Tierra di Gracia, by the fact that during the whole period of his stay there he was affected by a serious malady of the eyes. He would, perhaps, otherwise not have seen so much. The hectic ardour of his will made all his dreams true, and gave a tangible embodiment to all his illusions.

One cannot forbear asking what induced him to decide to steer so far southwards, to leave the seas that he knew, and, in spite of his ill health and his spiritual prostration, once more adventure into the unknown. One of the reasons is immediately obvious: he wanted at last to reach the continent of Asia and the wonderful islands of Zipangu, his original goal; the other is to be found in the superstition of the time, that where the sun shines the hottest there are to be found the greatest treasures of the earth,—precious metals, pearls, spices, and aromatic substances. There exists a documentary opinion on the subject by a certain Mossen Jaimen Ferrer, a distinguished mineralogist and lapidary, who defends this hypothesis with

scholastic thoroughness, and by quotations from the writings of Cæsar and the Apostles. The famous Peter Martyr, who was a contemporary of Columbus, cries to all who sail the seas: "Southward! Southward! He who seeks riches should avoid the cold regions of the North."

But, when all is said, it was something beyond words and reason that sped this mediæval Ahasuerus on his eternal voyages and would not let him stay. It is his destiny and the law of his being. (This, too, might be evidence of a Jewish origin.) Although on the one hand he embodies the age more in the form of a symbol than a living personage, yet there is a chaotic element in his composition; and this is the element that makes him the direct progenitor, both as to character and motive, of all who came after him—all those adventurers, conquerors, explorers, empire-builders—all those Columbian Diadochi, as they may be called, who by their desperate or heroic deeds succeeded in writing their names on the tablets of immortality: Alonzo de Ojeda, Pedro Niño, Sebastian Cabot, Hernando Cortez, Nuñez Bilbao, Fernando Magalhães, Francisco Pizarro. These are only a small selection of those who regarded the lives of men (their own included) as of no more value than the lives of beetles. They raged over the New World like incarnate devils: not to achieve what they actually did achieve, for which they were later to be praised in history books, but to ease themselves

of the stress of their elemental energy. Without Columbus' discoveries they would probably have been choked for want of room, or burst forth and spread ruin far and wide.

It was certainly a magical force that always drove Columbus to Española once again, allured as he was by the West, and the land of the Great Cham that he believed to be so near. His heart clung to Española. The more impossible the situation there became, the more outrageously the Spanish immigrants behaved, the more futile were his efforts to establish order, the more often he had the humiliating experience of finding that his presence did but increase the trouble and stir up the few peacefully disposed to mutiny and discord, all the more irresistibly was he impelled to that bewitched island, as though there was something diabolic in him which, after he had witnessed the collapse of his hopes, craved for the spectacle of this human hell in a place that had been once so lovely. He regarded Española as a sacred trust placed in his charge by God—as, in a manner of speaking, his royal domain—and the bloody desolation to which it had been reduced by the licentious hordes of plundering colonists cut him to the soul. The fact that he himself had produced this state of affairs—that he had given way to the most outrageous demands on the one side, and been deaf to the most moving prayers for relief upon the other—he entirely dismissed from his consciousness. In all his

difficulties, it was always he who was badly treated. In his own eyes he was always innocent, and he evaded responsibility by sheltering himself under the divine decree. But when disaster stared him in the face he at once raised an outcry and complained that Heaven had betrayed him. In the labyrinths of his soul there was room for good and evil, yes and no, piety and infamy, but nothing grew to fulfilment.

The island of Española, later called San Domingo, played in the last half-decade of the fifteenth century almost the same part as California in the middle of the nineteenth, and Alaska at the beginning of the twentieth century. Europe scattered the off-scourings of her population on to the unhappy land, —thousands of broken and dishonoured men ready to do any shameful deed for gold. The Admiral's propaganda had had a far-reaching effect. The fact that on his third voyage he had not been able to get together a trained expedition must not be taken to mean that those in pursuit of gold and fortune had been frightened away by their disillusioned predecessors. The cause simply was that these people proceeded independently, and would not submit themselves to discipline on board a royal fleet. Although such attempts were strictly prohibited (mediæval Spain, like the Germany of Wilhelm II, was very lavish in such prohibitions), countless ships put out secretly from the home ports and landed their passengers as secretly on the

uninhabited coasts of Española. These roofless unequipped emigrants swept over the islands alone and in bands, spread terror in their path, and wherever they appeared, murder, robbery, and destruction were the order of the day. Many of them had taken nothing for their journey but a leather bag containing rice and meal, a spade, and a shovel. They thought that if they merely broke the surface of the earth they would come immediately on polished gold, and when their expectation was not fulfilled, and they fell into distress, they revenged themselves on the Indios, attacked their towns, slew all that came beneath their sword, and, exactly following the example of the regular *soldateska*, practised every kind of extortion upon their prisoners. Their ranks were shortly increased by countless deserters from the so-called regular troops, whose dissatisfaction with the rule of Columbus' brother was steadily increasing. The brutal and cruel Bartholomé, to whom the governorship had been entrusted during the Admiral's two-and-a-half years' absence, had continually to contend with all manner of insidious plots that, upon occasions, when the ownership of the goldfields came into question, degenerated into bloody fighting.

Bartholomé Colón, briefly called the *Adelantado*, was in no enviable position. Not merely had he to wage war upon the rebellious Spaniards, but also compel the Indios to obedience now that, having completely lost their faith in the Sons of Heaven,

and finding their very existence threatened, they had for some time past been preparing for a dangerous resistance. He had no money; he was expected to pay his officials, mercenaries, and workmen, and conduct an administration that had fallen into irretrievable chaos. The Spanish Treasury refused any kind of assistance, claiming justifiably that the colony should be self-supporting. To make this at least to some extent possible, the native tribes had to be laid under tribute, a proceeding which led to constant coercion and, as a result, to the most dreadful excesses, at first against the cacique Guarionex in the *Vega Real*, and subsequently against the chief Behechio and his beautiful sister Anacaona, the widow of Caonabo who had worn his life away in slavery. She seems to have been an heroic personality, proud, wild, and cunning, and she enjoyed a legendary fame among the Spaniards.

Bartholomé's army, if such an undisciplined rabble of bandits can be so described, was careful, when it went forth to battle, to make a great display of neighing horses, baying hounds, flying pennons, and blaring trumpets: moreover, he had an advantage in the fact that his rear was covered by five or six entrenched forts which the *Adelantado* had had constructed in various places to keep the tribes in subjection. Having regard to the object in view this pompous display was futile: gold was not forthcoming. They had to be satisfied to get their

tribute in the form of maize, cotton, and cassava bread. But the soldiers and the sailors were not at all disposed to be content with this; they suspected that the Indios had concealed the gold somewhere, and they beset the *Adelantado* with such vehemence that he found himself compelled to allow them to raid the Indian territories. This soon became an organised affair, a favourite popular amusement, a reminder of the *corridas* at home in Spain and the thousand-voiced yell: "*Mata le! mata le!*" before the bull collapses and dies.

This is but one instance among countless others. In addition, there were the pious crusades of the monks, among whom the hermit Roman Pane, and the Franciscan friar Borgognon, were especially prominent for their proselytising fury. By way of saving time they chiefly favoured mass production in their activities. They sang Latin litanies and Masses to the astounded Indios, and if one of them could babble out a parrot-like reproduction of the gabbled Paternosters and Ave Marias, a jug of water was hastily poured over his head, and the baptism of the new Christian was complete. In like manner Roman Pane had converted to Holy Church a prominent Indian of the *Vega Real*, in whose house he had taken up his lodging, together with his wives, children, brothers, and sisters, sixteen souls in all, and having been introduced by him to Guarionex, he appeared at the outset to be having some success with the latter's conversion:

indeed, the cacique even assisted him to build a chapel. But as soon as Guarionex heard of the tyranny and excesses of which the Fathers were guilty, he forbade any future activity on their part and chased them out of his territory. Scarcely had they departed when the villagers forced their way into the chapel, smashed the altar, destroyed the pictures and relics, and obliterated all traces of the little house of God. When the monks heard of this they brought an indictment against the tribe for Church robbery, sacrilege, and blasphemy. The *Adelantado*, from fear lest the fanatical priests might denounce him to the Inquisition if he did not humour them, consented to the establishment of a heresy tribunal, though he did not express his concurrence in any other way, for it must have been obvious to him that such bloody deeds would drive the Indios to desperation. Indeed, through all these manifestations of destruction and despotism, even the strongest characters produce the impression of moral marionettes. There was some diabolic element in them that stifled such remains as they had of decency, good sense, and humanity. The Indios were duly brought before the Court and charged in accordance with a strictly prescribed form, questioned in Spanish, which they did not understand, without the aid of an interpreter, examined in matters that they could not grasp, and to force them to a confession that could never have been anything but unintelligible to them, they were

put to a new variety of torture for which the instruments had been devised by some industrious Catholics on the island of Española itself. Then they were condemned to the stake, and publicly burnt: the first *auto-da-fé* in the newly discovered world. Shortly afterwards a miracle occurred. The relics stolen by the Indios were found through the agency of some one who was digging turnips in a field near to the scene of the outrage, and the turnips that emerged were not as ordinary turnips, but had grown into a cruciform shape.

But all this was only an ominous prelude. To protect those Indios who had paid the legally fixed tribute of gold or, in districts where there was no gold, of cotton—an *arroba* = 24 pounds, quarterly—against further unauthorised demands, the Admiral had arranged that they should wear a brass plaque around their necks by way of a receipt, just like dogs to-day on whom the tax has been paid. This did not, however, prevent their oppressors increasing their exactions as they might think fit, and if the total amount was not paid they had the power to demand a proportionate contribution of labour in the fields: a proceeding which was nothing more nor less than slavery. With this object, Columbus, so as not to incur the disfavour of either side, at the instance of the temporary landowners, obtained from the queen charters for the distribution of land. These so-called *Repartimientos* were not merely the cause of embittered and tedious lawsuits

among the colonists, but they left the Indios no other alternative than war to the knife, since they were simply deprived, by a mere stroke of the pen, of their arable land, their pastures, and their gardens, with the result that the affluent landowner of yesterday might to-day be turned out of house and home to beg his bread. Hatred of their feudal lords, and the yearning to be freed from this intolerable yoke, actually united many tribes who had lived at enmity for centuries. When the *Adelantado* sent a certain Indio, whom he used as a guide and interpreter, to the cacique Mayobane with the request that, as he had always been a friend of the Spaniards, he would deliver up the chief Guarionex who had sought shelter and sanctuary with the cacique, threatening that if the chief were not surrendered, he would lay waste the villages with fire and sword, he received the following reply: "Tell the Christians that they are evil, cruel, and treacherous. I do not desire the friendship of people who shed innocent blood and steal land that does not belong to them. Guarionex is my guest and I shall protect him: let the General come and fetch him if he can." This refusal, a welcome pretext, of course, led to a destructive campaign against the tribes of the *Vega Real*, and, ultimately, against those in the mountains of the interior. During his absence from the city of Isabella, Bartholomé Colón had entrusted his authority to his incapable and pusillanimous brother

Diego. (It is observable how one brother secures the advancement of another.) As a consequence, the disaffected party had serious grounds for complaint; every day brought forth some glaring piece of incompetence and the result was a conspiracy, at the head of which was a certain Franzisco Roldan. The hated rule of the brothers Colón must at all costs be overthrown. This Roldan was a thorough adventurer. As he was one of the few who could read and write, the Admiral had appointed him first Alcalde, then Chief Justice (*Juez mayor*) of Isabella, but the country had not provided him with the wealth for which he had hoped, and he had not even been paid his salary for some months past. Now that the whole administration of the colony was upside down, it seemed a favourable moment to renounce obedience to the *Adelantado*, and he fled with his adherents to the district of Xaragua, where he collected round him not only the Spanish rebels and freebooters but the insurgent caciques. He gave out that he was acting in the name and interest of the queen; that the true criminals were the Genoese brothers who had violated their oaths and were draining the province and the whole region dry: and having seized arms and cannon from the arsenal he laid siege to Fort Concepcion in which was posted the *Adelantado's* main fighting force.

Such was the aspect of affairs in his beloved Española when the Admiral returned to the island at the end of August, 1498. He forthwith reported Roldan's rising to the queen, informing her that he had refused to enter upon any negotiations, nor in any way undertaken to procure a pardon for Roldan (which was a conscious untruth). He asked that Roldan should be recalled to Spain and there tried by their Majesties, and he improved the occasion by ascribing all the disorder in the colony to the obstacles that had been placed in his way at the time of his departure. (He did not, incidentally, mention that he had spent months in searching for Paradise and the Empire of the Great Cham.) He also touched once more on his summary dealings with the infamous Ximeno Breviasca, justly suspecting that this might serve as a rope to put round his neck, and expressed the hope that neither this nor any other circumstance might be slanderously turned to his disfavour in their Majesties' eyes. (He already felt himself insecure and was seeking support on every side.) The natural resources of the island, so he asserted, called for nothing but hard work in order to satisfy the needs of the settlers: unfortunately they were lazy and dissolute. He must be allowed to send back the useless and mischievous characters on every ship sailing for home and replace them by frugal and industrious persons. (He should, indeed, have made the strongest protest against being supplied with convicts and galley slaves for his voyage,

but he had made up his mind to acquiesce in this.) He asked for a man learned in the law who could assume the office of Chief Justice in Roldan's place (the most insensate thing he could have done: it amounted to handing his enemy the very dagger with which to stab him); and finally he expressed the wish that he should be permitted to import slaves into Spain for two more years, in return for which he undertook only to supply the Spanish markets with cannibals, murderers, and rebels. Only!

The Admiral might indeed give orders that Roldan and his accomplices were to take ship for Spain, but it did not at all suit them to obey. He had proposed to send the *Adelantado* on a fresh voyage of exploration in the Gulf of Pearls, but it was not possible: he had to keep the royal elements nearby. So he decided to treat with Roldan and in October he wrote him an autograph letter in which he reminded him of the many kindnesses he had shown him, adjured him in the common interest to abandon his seditious attitude, and pledged his word for his personal security.

Roldan treated these advances with contempt, and was audacious enough to dictate his own conditions to the Admiral. He demanded no more and no less than the dismissal of the *Adelantado* (who had only recently been confirmed in this title by the Court), and, for himself, reinstatement in his office and the control of two forts and two ships. Not-

withstanding this piece of deliberate insolence, Columbus was careful not to break off negotiations. He carried his compliance so far as to promise the ringleader of the revolt and his accomplices written guarantees of security, and drafts on the Treasury for their pay and subsistence until the day of their arrival in Spain: each man, too, was to be given a certain number of slaves in accordance with his rank, and those who had married Indian wives were to be permitted to take them home in the capacity of slaves, or simply to leave them behind,—or, in other words, to regard the marriage as if it had never taken place. This agreement was signed in November by Roldan and his men outside Fort Concepcion, but instead of hurrying on the equipment of the promised ships and ridding himself quickly of this dangerous incubus, the Admiral, now once more in a roseate mood, entrusted the business to his lethargic and weak-minded brother Diego, while he himself, accompanied by Bartholomé, undertook a tour of the island to see, like a fussy housewife, that everything was in order. He had probably lulled himself into the belief that matters were not so bad as they had been described, but he soon had to admit that they were much worse. Fields and gardens had gone to waste, the Indios had abandoned their homesteads and plantations, and wherever the Admiral and his men appeared, the natives fled for miles like scared birds: there could be no further question of regular tribute,

the gold washings were no longer worked, whole valleys looked as though they had been burnt out, and entire plantations had the appearance of battle-fields. As the days went on the Admiral and Vice-roy grew more and more silent, and perhaps he asked himself in a lucid moment why he had given over this actual Paradise into the hands of evil men and sought for an imaginary one elsewhere.

When he returned to Isabella after his seven months' tour of inspection, he hoped to find news of Roldan's arrival in Spain and of the due conviction and punishment of the rebels. It came as a bolt from the blue to learn that they had not merely not departed, but had adopted an even more threatening attitude than before. As the Admiral had not carried out the treaty, they declared themselves no longer bound by the conditions and had entirely abandoned the idea of returning to Spain. Fresh negotiations: and a conference in a harbour of Xaragua (it was now the month of August). Columbus invited Roldan and his followers on board his ship,—he thought it only needed his angry eye and flaming speech to bring the insurgents to their knees: but he found himself confronted with an obstinate and impassioned enemy, and the result of the heated explanation was that the Admiral, defeated at all points, a very caricature of a commander and governor, had to sign the following humiliating pact. Fifteen of Roldan's companions agreed to sail for Spain provided they were given

a caravel at once: the remainder, who were to stay behind on Española, were to receive in place of their outstanding pay (Diego had neglected this just as he had postponed everything else), land in freehold possession for cultivation as fields and gardens: pledged and written assurance for all of them that their conduct was in no way deserving of censure and had not prejudiced the king's service: and, last of all, the reinstatement of Roldan in his office with authority to reside in the town of San Domingo; this to be published and generally made known. If the Admiral failed to carry out, curtailed, or violated any one of those articles, Roldan and his companions were to have the right of assembling and compelling their fulfilment by force.

Roldan personally received the royal estate of Esperanza in the *Vega Real*, and Columbus assigned to him, for the cultivation of the extensive lands it comprised, those natives whose noses and ears had been cut off by Alonzo de Ojeda in his campaign against Caonabo. Branded for sedition and revolt, these children of nature laboured for masters to whom sedition and revolt had brought rich rewards. What sort of notion of European morality must this have given them?

It is difficult to grasp how Columbus can have so much as raised his pen to set his name to a treaty by which he surrendered his authority for ever. It is not to be explained by the half-melancholy, half-magnificent renunciation that seizes upon weak

natures at certain moments of their lives and bids them surrender all that they have won, with a single heroic gesture. Indeed, he clung to power with all the fibres of his being, and its outward signs were more essential to him, its outward display and acknowledgment more important, than its exercise, for which he lacked the strength and the demeanour. It is true that he knew that many at home neither loved nor honoured him, and that many on whom he had relied had betrayed him. In reply to his report of Roldan's mutiny to the queen, he received, instead of an authorisation to take stern measures in the matter, instructions from the Bishop of Badajoz to the effect that their Majesties desired to leave the affair in suspense for the time being, and before reaching a decision, consider what might be the most practicable method of dealing with the difficulty. But no man, conscious of his purpose and the justice of his cause, would have acquiesced in such a course, least of all a man set apart by Fate, a Leader, a Forerunner, one who had opened the portals of a new world. Was he not rather a poet first of all? Is not Don Quixote a secret poet, with all the horror of reality, all the incapacity to deal with it, that is born in all poets? It is strangely moving: amid all his embarrassments and evil perplexities, while, through his dumb indifference and the miscarriage of his financial speculations he was helping, in the most cowardly and heartless manner, to exterminate a noble race, and

thus turning Christianity into a phrase and religion into a lie, his mind was entirely occupied with the most detailed plans for rebuilding the Temple of Jerusalem. He knew not what he did. This will have been recorded in his favour by the Highest Judge of all, and he will find pardon at the end. He knew not what he did, neither in good things nor in evil.

Those at home in Spain had been informed of the events in Española down to the smallest detail, and the enemies of Columbus had made extensive preparations for his destruction. We cannot, of course, now discover the names of those who burrowed in the darkness, but they must have been a pretty collection of mice and rats. When Bishop Fonseca had, by the agency of his spies, collected enough evidence against the arrogant Genoese, he considered the moment had arrived to dispose of him for ever. This bishop seems to have been a man of abnormal jealousy, a man whom any notable achievement, whether his own interest were prejudiced or not, stirred to implacable persecution and revenge. Twenty years later we find him, equally without cause, opposing Hernando Cortez and charging one of his creatures with the murder of that bold and too autocratic conqueror.

Columbus had indeed come to terms with Roldan, but the peace was not honourably kept on either side. In his anger at the violence he had been made to suffer, he announced that he had signed the treaty on his ship as Master of the Sea, but that he

need not respect it on land in his capacity as Viceroy —a perfidious contention, whose deceitfulness invites all sorts of conclusions as to the degradation to which an originally upright character is exposed on the vicious paths of politics. It is true that if he had had the talent for this pursuit and achieved success, he would not merely have been excused, but, as the world is constituted, he would have won the admiration of the centuries; but, in the event, all that can be offered him is pity, and that is too little for an immortal.

Other disorders broke out subsequently to Roldan's revolt, and the Admiral was forced to make use of Roldan as an ally: there is, indeed, a letter in existence in which he thanks him warmly for his help. But his fate was sealed when he begged the queen to send out a supreme arbitrator who was to call the rebel to account for his high treason. Roldan on his side had not been idle, he had entrusted influential friends with the conduct of his affairs in Spain, and got them to circulate carefully composed memorials of grievances, compared with which the Admiral's agitated and pathetic narratives seemed confused and ineffective. As a result, the Commendator Franzisco Bobadilla, one of the king's creatures, was sent to Española to regulate the affairs of that unhappy island, and give judgment. On August 29, 1500, he arrived at San Domingo. He brought with him letters of credence in which the Admiral was curtly enjoined to

submit himself to the orders of the Royal Commissary, and hand over to him all fortified places, ships, and Crown property. The Admiral happened to be in the *Vega Real* and Bartholomé in Xaragua: the Commissary, accordingly, caused the king's order appointing him governor to be publicly exhibited, took possession of the official buildings, released the prisoners, confiscated the Admiral's house and property, appropriated his weapons, his horses, his gold and silver plate, his letters, books, and papers, announced a general dispensation to seek for gold for a period of twenty years subject to the delivery to the State of the eleventh part only (hitherto a third part had had to be given up), and, above all, he discharged all outstanding pay and salaries. The Spaniards were naturally delighted with him and regarded him as a deliverer.

Certain monks who were devoted to the Admiral hurried with dismay into the *Vega* and informed him of what had happened. He wrote to Bobadilla one of his most bombastic letters, wished him joy of his arrival, and stated that he was ready to sail for home at once and justify himself at Court. At the same time he protested against the invasion of his privileges. He then rode to the city unattended. Here he was seized by Bobadilla's mercenaries, put in chains, and brought to the fort where his brother Diego already lay imprisoned, and Bartholomé was soon to join them.

Two months elapsed before the ships could set sail for Spain with the three brothers. During this time they were treated as criminals. The interval was necessary to enable Bobadilla to collect all the charges against them, and place a comprehensive statement in the hands of the knight Alonzo de Villejo, who was to carry it to Spain and also take charge of the prisoners. The main counts against the brothers Colón were: that they had imposed the most exhausting labours and painful privations on the Spanish troops, and, moreover, half-starved them and punished them brutally; that they had waged unjust wars against the Indios; that they had hindered the conversion of the Indios, so as to be better able to sell them as slaves; that the Admiral had concealed pearls and gold which he had collected on his journey to Paria, and left their Majesties uninformed of new discoveries, so as to extort new privileges for himself. All this sounds like a parody of a legal investigation, and it culminates in the assertion that the mutinies must be regarded as a spirited and legitimate resistance to the tyranny of the Admiral and his relatives.

"The very stars fought against Columbus and his brothers," says the historian Herrera. When Villejo went to the State prison to fetch the Admiral, the mob outside howled so loudly that Colón thought he was to be led out to execution. "Villejo," he cried anxiously, "whither would you take me?" "To the ship, Excellency," re-

plied the officer. "Is that true?" "As true as God lives," answered Villejo, who was an honourable man, and though in Fonseca's service, was greatly distressed by the degrading treatment to which the Admiral was being subjected. The captain of the caravel, also, one Andreas Martin, was much moved, and received his prisoner with respect and consideration. Both of them wanted to remove his fetters during the voyage, but he would not allow it. "Their Majesties commanded me in writing to submit myself to Bobadilla's orders," said he; "it was in Their Majesties' name that he had me put into fetters; I shall wear them until they command them to be removed, and I shall preserve them until the end of my days as memorials of the recompense I received for my services."

And he did so: he clung to his chains as though they had been a right, in a sort of melancholy dalliance with his destiny. He wore them when he landed in Cadiz; he wore them when he arrived in Seville. Las Casas, the chronicler, who had just concluded his studies at Salamanca, and returned to his native city of Seville, saw the Discoverer of a World in iron fetters.

This occurrence—monstrous from any point of view—was later on used by most biographers as an excuse for romantic exaggerations and theatrical effects. It does not need such aids. The fact is irrefrageable and suffices for a gloomy judgment on human intelligence and gratitude. Posterity is

always ready to make good the sins of past contemporaries, but in the meantime the living man has been sacrificed; the hymns of posterity are so much waste paper, its vindications are a hypocritical attempt to shift an inexpiable guilt onto the shoulders of dead forbears. Austere critics say that Columbus paid the due penalty for his criminal weakness. But such a phenomenon as this, apart from the fact that it is beyond all social categories, stands out a melancholy memorial for ever, and is to be judged by other than temporal moral standards: it is something tremendous, something beyond the scope of all transitory conceptions, and every attempt to analyse or describe it can only be the faintest adumbration.

How it appeared from the inside, in Columbus' own soul, we know from the grandiose "*carta al ama*", the letter to the Infante's nurse, who in her last years became in some sort a confidante of his.

"Most honoured Lady," he begins: "if it be a new thing for me to complain of the world, it is no new thing for the world to misconceive its servants. It has cruelly trampled me to the ground. My hope in Him who created us all keeps me steadfast. God made me the messenger of the new Heaven and the new earth, and He shewed me where I should find them. I came, and there is no one, down to the vilest of them all, that does not seek to slander

me. If I had stolen India and given it to the Moors, Spain could not have shewn me greater enmity."

Strong words: under the torment of injustice the old, sick man turns into an angry god. He describes what happened on the fatal island, while he was discovering new lands and golden mountains (supposedly for his beloved queen) and therewithal came upon the Paradise of the Bible; how he returned and tried to mediate between the parties and was betrayed; how every one abused his confidence: how evilly he had been used by those who owed him fortune, fame, and wealth: and how the sincerity of his intentions had been questioned. "I cannot conceive," he writes, "how anyone can hold me so foolish as to think I did not know that even if India belonged to me I could not maintain myself there without the protection of a King. And if that be so, where could I have found better protection and support than at the hands of the King and Queen who raised me out of nothing?"

Then he describes at large the details of the shameful ill treatment that befell him, and the personality of Bobadilla. He bursts forth like an erupting volcano: "For six months long was I ready to bring Their Majesties good news of gold, and give up my rule over that ruffianly mob who in their wickedness and arrogance brought dishonour upon the Queen and upon the King. All I needed

for my purpose was sixty thousand *maravedis*, and the taxes would have come to four millions, but I have fallen into such evil repute that when I caused churches and hospitals to be built it was said that they were dens for thieves. I was two years in Spain; I asked nothing and I received nothing, neither for myself nor for those who came with me, and Bishop Fonseca filled his purse—he did not need to ask nor to bestir himself. It would be truly a good deed if Their Majesties would check these rumours that hang over me. They know what trouble I went through to secure their property and authority, and how I drew no profit for myself therefrom: thus at least would my good name and my honour in the world be restored. I cannot understand—I swear it—why I am a prisoner. Bobadilla's first care was to lay his hands on the gold that I had collected, and he did so without measuring or weighing it, and in my absence. He said he wanted to pay it out, for it was due to various persons, but I have been assured that he kept the greater part for himself. I had put aside certain specimens of this gold to give pleasure to Their Majesties, and help them to realise the importance of the undertaking: and therewith were nuggets as large as hen's and goose's eggs. The scoundrel embezzled all this so that Their Majesties should not suspect the value of my discoveries. If Their Majesties would call for an account of these matters the truth would be brought to light. No

one could be made to suffer a greater insult than I was, when a man was sent out to judge me who knew very well that he had but to slander me in order to take my place. I was treated like a Governor sent to a civilised Province, where he can rule by established laws. I was to be disgraced as if I were a General who has mishandled a campaign; but nothing can be done with soldiers in that country, because the inhabitants live scattered in the forests. I was to be disgraced like a paltry Captain, who has never had his sword out of his hand for years, and yet in India, where there are no towns, and treaties do not hold, I could in no manner proceed in accordance with established usage. The way to gold and pearls stands open —would to Heaven that it were as certain that I should not suffer for it, as it is sure that what I wrote to Their Majesties before my first voyage will be fulfilled! I know too well that I have made mistakes, but I never purposely did wrong. Their Majesties will understand that. They will lay everything in the balance, just as, according to Holy Writ, on the Day of Judgment good will be weighed against evil. When Bobadilla came to San Domingo, he lodged in my house and took everything that was in it. He may have needed it, but no pirate ever dealt worse with the merchants that he robbed. But the cruellest blow to me is that he has got possession of my papers, none of which I have been able to recover, and he has been

especially careful to hide just those that I most need for my defence. Whence you may see what a just judge he is, what an honourable man! But God, our Lord, abides in His power and wisdom, and will punish the ungrateful. So much is certain, that nearly all those who come to India are unworthy of the grace of baptism. It is a new thing that a man sent out to hold an enquiry should collect traitors and rebels and call them as witnesses against him who had to rule them. If a man thinks upon the whole matter, he might well be astonished that the Island of Española has not yet been swallowed up in the sea. And had I not escaped the judgment, Their Majesties must recognise that I have done them infinite service, as they have done to me,—in love, as it always should be, for where there is no love, there all things cease."

This is eloquence that the centuries have not robbed of any of its primitive force.

CHAPTER XII

Indian Inferno

This letter was, of course, intended indirectly for the queen: Donna Juana della Torre immediately handed it to her mistress, and it did not fail of the desired effect. Isabella was furious at learning how shamefully her Admiral had been treated, and the king had, for decency's sake, to make a show of surprise and indignation at the way in which his orders had been "misunderstood." The most disagreeable feature in the whole business was the great sensation caused in all Spain, and far beyond, by the arrival of the Viceroy and Grand Admiral as a prisoner in chains. On the grounds of prestige alone it was necessary to give satisfaction to the injured man as quickly as possible. He was invited to the Court, which then lay at Granada, and was granted two thousand ducats to meet the costs of his own and his brother's journey.

His appearance at the Court has become engraved on the memory of the centuries by the dazzled imagination of historians, as a scene from a picture book, as moving as it is mendacious. When the queen saw this outwardly imposing figure, with his white hair, his careworn brow, and his dignified

demeanour, she is said to have burst into tears. Columbus, who maintained that in all the conflicts of the world he had endured injustice and slander with proud contempt, in that hour (it is said) lost his self-control, flung himself at the feet of the queen, and was so choked by sobs that for a long while he could not utter a word. The king raised him to his feet and encouraged him with gracious words.

Not a syllable of this is true. Hernando Colón, who put in circulation the most glowing legends about his father, knows nothing of this occurrence, and he would certainly not have let slip so effective a piece of melodrama, if he had had the slightest evidence in support of it. He contents himself with the remark that the Admiral was received with every display of friendliness by their Majesties in Granada, and that they assured him that his arrest and imprisonment had been against their knowledge and wish. All the rest is an insipid idyll in the style of Kotzebue super-imposed onto the sinister and splendid epic like an eleograph onto an heroic fresco.

So much is correct, that his complaints and grievances received a hearing and he was promised justice. His property would be restored to him, and he would be reinstated in his offices and dignities. So much was said: and he believed it. He believed that in time, when their Majesties had convinced themselves of his honesty and good

intentions, they would reappoint him Viceroy, and that he would return in triumph to Española. A calamitously naive delusion: when he became aware of it, it destroyed him. His was a truly childish innocence that enabled him to bear his optimism before him like a banner in the wind, while the foundations of his life were collapsing, and, in plain fact, hardly a soul would speak to him. He saw the queen as a benignant angel hovering above him, and himself as a martyr, for whose sufferings no earthly recompense was great enough; and his discovery was in his own eyes the greatest deed that ever mortal man had achieved or would achieve. Yes, he was a martyr, and his discovery was a mighty deed; but, blinded by his arrogance in his destiny, intoxicated by the illusion of his own uniqueness, he completely lost all power of judgment, sense of proportion, and perception of spiritual values.

The numerous discoveries that were being made at the time under the Portuguese and English flags were causing King Ferdinand much disquiet. His insatiable avarice was combined with torturing jealousy. Hitherto it had seemed as though Spain alone possessed the right to search for the undiscovered lands of Ocean, and alone had any pretensions to exploit them: but now other claimants were appearing on the scene, other nations were coming into prominence, eager to share the golden world with him. For he was Spain, the new lands

were his to enjoy, and to protect, and if others, too, profited thereby—a few great lords, or a few nameless adventurers, that could only be because he gave them his gracious permission.

When, eight years before, he set his name to the capitulations signed with the Genoese, he never dreamed that such immeasurable territories would come under his sovereignty, and, in his haughty ignorance, he regarded the whole undertaking as a speculation on the queen's belief in miracles. But now, in the plenitude of possession, he felt as though he had been outwitted by Columbus in the agreements he had made, and every fresh discovery by the Admiral, instead of increasing his gratitude, only served to heighten his resentment and regret that he had allowed himself to be entrapped by a crafty adventurer and tempted into such a folly as to sign the document in question.

How could such a piece of unpardonable rashness be undone? There were, indeed, various methods. A suspicion could be put about that the Admiral was silently planning the foundation of an independent administration: his disordered ambition made such a thing credible, and the Roldan disturbances would provide evidence enough if carefully examined by skilful jurists. He might even be charged with scheming to hand over the new lands to foreign kings, so as to secure greater advantages for himself: there had been, also, occurrences that would support such an accusation. It was only

necessary to let fall the slightest indication of such a possibility and dozens of obliging sycophants were ready to provide the suspicious monarch with a crime and evidence complete. But it was not convenient to go so far as this, and there were reasons against proceeding to extremities. However, in the meantime, there was not the smallest intention of reinstating a man so greedy for power, whatever might be his services or his crimes, in the supreme command and the viceregal office.

The main point now was that Columbus was no longer indispensable. He had been so far useful in that he had discovered New India. For this he had been appropriately rewarded, perhaps even beyond his deserts, and enjoyed a fame that, from the point of view of an absolute monarch, might well be considered inadmissible. But as the situation had developed, any ordinary ship's captain could fill Columbus' place. A number of capable seamen had received their training under him and had gained experience on his voyages. There were applications at the Ministry of the Colonies from persons who were anxious to fit out an expedition at their own expense: Pedro Alonzo Niño and Vincente Pinzon had done so, and had handed over to the Crown a considerable proportion of the proceeds. What was the object in bestowing princely dignities and dangerous privileges in return for services which capable men could now be found to perform for nothing? None the less, it was difficult

to dispose of so celebrated a man and dismiss him without more ado; it would be necessary to put him off with vague promises, suggest enquiries, fix a date, and then postpone it, and indeed proceed as was commonly done in such cases, then as to-day. The king had a tolerably free hand, as it would appear that Isabella would no longer take any part in colonial affairs: she was in poor health, and heavy blows like her son's death and her daughter's threatened madness had soured her temper and paralysed her will.

So the Admiral was told that the dissensions on Española still continued, that his return would stir up fresh strife, and moreover his personal security would be in danger: the intention was to remove Bobadilla from his command and replace him provisionally by a younger and experienced official who would be capable of remedying the existing abuses and purging the island of its rebellious rabble. He, Colón, must be patient and take care of himself: as soon as settled conditions had been established, his reinstatement would be considered.

With this he had to be satisfied. Impassively he listened, and he heard such words many times—from the Chancellor, the Minister for the Colonies, and the archbishops, likewise the chamberlains and the judges; he must hold his peace and wait, and bear with his humiliations. Bobadilla was actually recalled; his successor, Nicholás de Ovando, Military Governor of Lares, Knight of the Order of

Alcantara, red of hair and beard, a servile courtier and a bigoted Catholic, passed for an able man and an experienced administrator, but he had not the slightest notion of oversea conditions, as shortly afterwards appeared, for, under his term of office, what Columbus had unwillingly begun was systematically carried out: the butchery of the Indian race. Moreover, later on, he behaved very basely in the most desperate situation into which Columbus ever fell.

Condemned to dispiriting idleness, waiting month after month for the judgment that should absolve him, during the year 1501 the Admiral wrote in Seville that "Book of Prophecies" that revealed him as completely engulfed in religious mysticism. He bethought him of his former vow that within seven years from the discovery of the New World he would raise fifty thousand foot and fifty thousand horse to seize the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the infidels. The period had expired, and his vow had never been fulfilled; the New World with all its treasures had hitherto been a source of expense rather than of profit, and he himself, far from being able to pay an army, was poor, abandoned, and deprived of his offices. But to inspire the king and queen at least with enthusiasm for the enterprise, he collected from the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, the writings of the saints and of philosophers of all sorts, every passage that might be interpreted as referring to the conversion

of the heathen and the conquest of Jerusalem, even when their intention was more than questionable: he also used the notes that he had made two years before in San Domingo, and with the help of a learned Carthusian monk he brought the whole into a closed system, which swelled into a majestic volume, and offered the work to their Majesties with a comprehensive accompanying letter, the ardent enthusiasm of which was only surpassed by the pitiful simplicity of mind that made it possible, and, like most of its author's lucubrations, served to show that his intellectual level was surprisingly low even for his age. Spanish Darkness!

He adjured the sovereigns not to delay the crusade, as the stability of the world was only secure for a brief space. "Saint Augustine teaches us," he writes, "that the end will come seven thousand years after the Creation. This also is the opinion of Cardinal Pedro de Aliaco. Your Majesties know that the period of time from Adam to the birth of Christ is calculated at five thousand three hundred and forty years and three hundred and eighteen days. Fifteen hundred and one years have elapsed since the birth of our Lord, and consequently the world is therefore in its sixth-thousand eight hundred and forty-sixth year: there are, therefore, still one hundred and fifty-eight years until the end."

Except for these tortuous speculations he would have been consumed with impatience. With all the

power of his soul, which was not small, he strove against his ailing body and the burdens of old age. The event of the day was Vasco da Gama's circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope, by means of which the Portuguese had discovered the sea-route to the East Indies. The treasures of Calcutta, the wealth of Hindustan, were in all men's mouths, and it was related that he, and after him Alvarez Cabral, came home laden with pearls, silver, gold, amber, ivory, porcelain, silk stuffs, precious woods, gum, and spices of all kinds. Columbus was not in the least dismayed, depressed, or beset by doubts as to whether the way he had taken was the right way to India; indeed, not a suspicion of the sort ever entered his mind. He promptly conceived the plan of another journey which was to put Gama's discovery as well as his own previous enterprises completely in the shade. He ignored the fact that the Florentine Vespucci had in the meantime come upon a vast continent that could not possibly be Asia. He would not listen. It could not be true. For him the only continent was Asia. That continent he must reach at any price and by any means, or he would have lived and sailed the seas in vain. He had, indeed, on his previous journeys, crossed the Caribbean Sea, and it might be assumed almost with certainty that the currents led to a channel, and through that channel there must be a passage that must bring him to India. This could not be explained away; he was as certain of it as he was of

everything that he had prophesied, and had proved precisely true.

He set forth his plan: he drew careful maps and submitted them to the authorities. The result was much embarrassment; it was thought that the troublesome man had been disposed of, and suddenly he emerged with something fresh. He was a man hard to silence, for he could talk any one out of countenance. All kinds of objections were raised. There was no money—the treasures of Aragon and Castile were completely empty. "No matter," he would reply, "I will raise the money." Yes, but Ovando's reports had not yet come in, and on them, he must understand, it depended whether he could be reinstated in the royal service. He will have none of it. "Do but let me speak with the King," he said. He still had a few friends who believed in him, and they managed to get him admitted to His Majesty's presence. Never was his eloquence so compelling, his enthusiasm so ardent, and his arguments so forcible as at this audience with Ferdinand. Whether the king was won over and convinced is uncertain. It is possible that he was tempted by the notion of a nearer and safer means of communicating with India than the Portuguese had discovered. Perhaps this consideration made him inclined to the project, and he sanctioned it, though with some misgivings. It is more probable that he wanted to be rid of this pestilent nuisance whose powers of persuasion and morose

fanaticism he had good reason to fear. The pitiable vessels that were put at Columbus' disposal for the expedition, and their utterly inadequate equipment, did indeed give ground for the suspicion that it was hoped in this way to dispose of the man entirely, and for ever; five diminutive caravels of between fifty and seventy tons each, with crews amounting to one hundred and fifty men in all. (It is strange how the ships once again play the part of Rosinante.) The sorry nutshells were in danger of sinking in the least swell; a storm was not needed for the purpose. This time, in all human probability (especially with a little human assistance), the fate that he had so often tempted in his vain search for fame must at last overtake the restless sea rover.

If this criminal calculation had any real foundation (I must confess it is hard to doubt it), it provides an explanation for the fact that the king, in spite of his unconcealed dislike of the Admiral, renewed all the previous agreements. Nay more,—he actually offered, in case of necessity, to confirm these privileges to his son Diego, so that he might set sail in peace of mind and confidence. The Spanish king could much more readily deal with so young a man, and one so entirely dependent on the favour of the Court than with his insatiable and querulous father. Whatever reservations and evasions were concealed behind this gracious letter in the king's own hand, cannot now be determined. Spanish social customs and conventions had, at this

time, something utterly impenetrable and mysterious about them. How little he was trusted, Columbus discovered soon enough: his petition to be allowed to settle in Española was flatly refused.

He did not indulge any false hopes. He returned suspicion with suspicion: he had duplicates made of all contracts, concessions, and privileges in which he was recognised as Grand Admiral, Viceroy, and Governor of India, and had them certified by the Alcalde of Seville, together with copies of his letter to Donna Juana della Torre; and he drew up in duplicate a communication to the Bank of Genoa, assigning the tenth part of his revenues to the reduction of the corn tax then (a very astute move, for by this means he compelled his native city to defend his rights and interests); and he sent a number of documents, by the agency of various persons, to his friend, Doctor Nicolo Oderigo, the former Genoese Ambassador to the Spanish Court, with the request that they might be put into safe keeping. Thanks to this far-reaching caution, these documents have come down to our time. Copies of these papers were found in 1816 in the library of the Senator Count Cambiaso, and four years later were bestowed in the urn that adorns the Columbus monument in Genoa.

Volumes could be written on the fourth and last voyage, and, even so, we can only faintly grasp how perilous and adventurous it must have been. If one goes through what the chroniclers collected and

recorded on the subject; what Columbus himself wrote about it—a confused, obscure, and senile narrative: the statement of Diego Porras, the notary, who was an eyewitness and shared his leader's sufferings; and, finally, what Diego Mendez, the Admiral's devoted servant, relates concisely and conscientiously in his will, one's blood runs cold after four hundred years. The hardships were so terrible that one finds oneself wondering how human beings could endure them without deliberately ending their own lives, and more especially their ailing, worn-out, prematurely aged and decrepit leader. Hunger, disease, terrible and interminable storms, torturing heat, shipwreck, the collapse of all discipline, treachery on every side, and an atmosphere of hatred and despair, turned the journey into a veritable descent into Hell.

It was so appalling an adventure that one might believe the accounts of it were the deliberate inventions of romancers, if the events were not confirmed from unimpeachable sources. For here are all the elements that for centuries have stirred the hearts of primitive seekers after excitement and made them catch their breath—the wild turbulence of the ocean and its mysterious fascination, sudden vicissitudes of fate, imminent peril and deliverance, sea rovers who set their course for the unknown and ran their ships on to the shores of dreaming islands forgotten by this world. The story has travelled down the years clothed in flesh and blood; it has kindled the

imagination of Youth and fired its longing for great deeds, so that the reality that lies at the base of it has almost passed into oblivion. But there is no invention in this matter—perhaps, indeed, invention is, strictly speaking, impossible: what the human mind imagines must have happened somehow and somewhere, though it be subsequently distorted and formalised, and grow lifeless and false. Even Robinson Crusoe's story did actually happen, and as the number of motive forces in human life—mythical, historical, and romantic—is limited, some few take on the typical Form, and serve as a variation on the original theme until in time they wither and die away. The last voyage of Christopher Columbus is just such a parent-event, a root motive, from which all manner of poems, sagas, and, of course, much that is merely fable, has arisen.

The Admiral took two trustworthy persons with him on the journey: his brother Bartholomé, now no more *Adelantado*, but a man of many grievances waiting for reinstatement, and his nineteen-year-old son, Hernando. It seems almost incredible that he should have risked the life of his own boy, for he must have known the rashness of his enterprise, the terrors to which he must look forward, and the condition of the ships: what, then, was the motive? Was he haunted by the pedantic purpose of training him as his successor, as a hero too? It is known that he deeply loved this offspring of a

passionate relationship, possibly the only one in his life, and his decision cannot have arisen from thoughtless frivolity or the idea of inuring his boy to hardship. I see only one plausible reason: he felt himself much alone, and much misunderstood; he stood in sore need of human warmth and admiration, care, and kindness, even the notice of his fellow men, and he was without them all. It was very likely the desire to have with him at the most critical epoch of his life, when he felt the end could not be far away, the being who was nearest to his heart, and at the same time to show him an example of greatness in enduring and overcoming all the hardships that Heaven might send, that made him disregard the call of duty and common sense. Moreover, in the depths of his consciousness still lay the conviction that God would lead him to the promised goal, and that nothing could befall him until he had reached it.

His instructions contained an order that he was to take on board with him one or two persons who knew Arabic (so as to make himself understood upon his arrival in Asia); and he was to take the shortest route to the west, without, as was again emphasised, putting in at Española.

However, it became necessary to call at the island, as a succession of the most violent storms had so damaged one of his ships that he wanted to exchange it for another in San Domingo. But when he came within sight of the coast, and asked

Ovando's permission in an extremely courteous letter to be allowed to effect this exchange, the governor curtly forbade him to set foot on land. He was only able to deliver a packet of letters for Spain, and had once more to venture forth on the surging ocean. He writes as follows: "Any man, not even excluding Job himself, would have been ready to die of despair on the spot in the situation in which I found myself. I was in fear for my own safety and even more for that of my brother and my son, and indeed for that of all my following. And to think that I should have been barred from that land and that harbour that I won for the King by God's help, and sweating blood in the deed. For eighty days without ceasing was I driven out of my course by so terrible a hurricane that during this time I saw neither the sun nor the stars, the ships were leaking, the sails torn, the anchors, cables, and a great part of the equipment was lost. In their despair the sailors made a vow to enter a monastery, and they would often hear each other's confessions. More than once I stood at the gate of death; I commanded the ship from a little chamber that I had had erected on the deck; my brother was on the worst ship, which troubled me the more, as I had advised him to come with us against his will: and the thought that after twenty years' grinding labour I must needs bring my child with me, because in Spain I had no roof that I could call my own—indeed I had to go to an inn when I wanted to eat

or sleep, and often I had not enough money to pay the reckoning—this thought tore the very heart out of my shoulders."

The motive that he here gives for taking his son with him, to justify himself, of course, against the reproaches that were to be expected, will not hold water, and is a true Columbian exaggeration: the point will arise again later. This does not, however, prevent our having once again an opportunity of marvelling at the crushing force of his manifesto. Like Don Quixote, he is unsurpassable in speech and writing.

It seems like an act of divine Nemesis, that in that same hurricane in which the Admiral was caught and hurled out of his course, the fleet that was to bring all his Españolan enemies back to Spain went down. The governor Bobadilla, Francisco Roldan and his fellow rebels, and a horde of those swindlers, blackmailers, and greedy adventurers that had made the island as unsafe as though it had been the criminal quarter of a modern city,—all were lost. Columbus learnt of the catastrophe from a few wrecked sailors that he was able to rescue. One can judge from his character the sense of triumph, of dark satisfaction, that possessed him. Heaven itself had struck, to avenge him and destroy his opponents. It was indeed food for his delusion that he had been set apart by destiny and was the emissary of God. In some strange fashion an external event often enters the lives of such men as

this, so exactly in keeping with their inner being that it seems as though it had really been written in the stars.

Moreover, it so happened that only one ship rode out the storm, namely that which had on board Columbus' fortune, several thousand gold pieces, confiscated by Bobadilla. But as, owing to the serious damage it had suffered, it had to put in to San Domingo, the gold was again sequestrated and its restitution delayed by litigation that lasted several years. Indeed, it was probably not until shortly before his death, after many petitions, writs, and processes, that he succeeded in getting possession of that not inconsiderable sum.

Bobadilla carried valuable cargoes that now lay at the bottom of the sea. One must certainly accept contemporary estimates with scepticism; the men of those times were all too much inclined to boastful exaggeration. Alexander von Humboldt calculated that the gold imported to Europe between the years 1492–1500 did not amount to more than sixteen thousand marks at present values. The really considerable importation of gold, the true fairy-tale treasures, did not begin until the conquest of Mexico and Peru.

There was, indeed, on Bobadilla's ship a piece of solid gold, which is constantly referred to in the Spanish chronicles; it is said to have weighed eighteen hundred *castellanos*, that is, about thirty-two pounds, and to have been found by an Indian

woman in a little stream. However, a later historian remarks that among all the gold there was not a single nugget that was not stained by the blood of murdered Indians. And that, certainly, is no lying exaggeration.

The Admiral reached the coast of the American continent at Cape Gracias à Dios. The natives, possibly warned by their priests, opposed his landing, and he was forced to set sail again. He steered southwards, changed his direction to the southwest, and proceeded cautiously along the coasts of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. At the end of September he cast anchor off a town called Cariai, to refit and rest his crews. The natives, as was always the case upon their first encounter with Europeans, behaved in a way that the Spaniards found it hard to understand; their demeanour hovered between fear and curiosity, mistrust and astonishment, respect and abhorrence, hospitality and evil foreboding. They saw before them marvellous creatures on marvellous ships, who made as though they would be friendly, but had awe-inspiring faces. They were given presents that delighted them,—strange and magical objects; and in return they brought cotton wraps and shirts, and trifling gold ornaments, but lo! these remarkable creatures would take nothing from them. The Admiral had, in fact, forbidden his men to accept anything, as he wanted to convince them how generous and disinterested he and his companions were. The old

tactics, and quite mistaken; he merely hurt their feelings; they thought themselves and their gifts despised, collected everything they had received from him, piled it into a heap, and left it on the shore.

This is only one picture from many, one example among countless others. The savages' trustfulness went so far that of their own free will they brought two young girls on board as hostages: they had tactfully realised that the strangers lacked courage to go on land to fetch water and fresh provisions, and they spontaneously offered security. While the sailors filled their casks, the elders of the tribe stood at a distance to see that none of their fellow tribesmen annoyed their guests. Their chiefs then carried the *Adelantado* to land, and set him down with solemn ceremony upon the green sward. His purpose was to collect information about the neighbourhood, and he had the notary of the fleet, Porras, summoned, to draw up a record of what they said. (This, in view of their ignorance of each other's language, could lead to nothing but the most arbitrary statements.) However, as soon as Porras had laid out his pen, ink, and paper and proposed to begin to write, the whole collection of Indios took to their heels in quaking terror; they took him for a magician and an exorcist. After a while they came cautiously back, scattered a certain dust in the air and set fire to some of it, so that the smoke was blown towards the Spaniards. But the absurd thing is that the Spaniards on their side

felt no less fear of the magic arts of the savages. "In Cariai," writes the Admiral, "there are dangerous magicians. My men would have given everything to leave the place as quickly as possible. Some of them thought themselves bewitched in all seriousness, and indeed they think so still."

Then comes the deed of violence, inevitable as the Amen at the end of a prayer. Half a dozen Indios were secretly collected and brought on board to be used as guides; the anchor was raised in silence, and the ship put out to sea amid the horrifying lamentations of the villagers who had discovered the outrage too late.

If history had not been written hitherto with too great respect for deeds, and too great admiration for so-called men of action, perhaps humanity would stand to-day at a higher stage of justice, civilisation, and culture.

In October the Admiral and his sorry fleet reached the Gulf of Chiriqui on the Isthmus of Panama. It is not uninteresting to note that in his restless wanderings of many months, northwards, southwards, and eastwards, he sought the waterway to Asia just at that very point where Nature had made preparations to create it, though she had not completed her work. Now and then he gets near the truth in his ideological speculations, or, maybe, he had the gift of a seer who can distinguish *possible* realities by the side of fictions?

The natives, so far as they could be understood,

reported the existence of civilised peoples in the interior: the inhabitants wore golden crowns, bracelets, shoe buckles, and garments of gold brocade: their chairs, cupboards, and tables were inlaid with pure gold. They called the land Ciguare or Ciamba: there were indistinct rumours of the empires of Mexico and Peru, which the Admiral exaggerated after his fashion, and brought into connection with the Great Cham, whose realm, he thought, began at that point. "Ten days more and I reach the Ganges." He went boldly on and ignored the murmurings of his men against the continuance of the voyage. This time his mind was not set upon amassing gold: to lose no time he forbade his men to engage in barter with the Indios, and provoked them accordingly to the most venomous fury. This mysterious passage that he sought with the impatience of a madman, while his ships grew more and more leaky and the bore worm ate away the shrouds, was a matter of utter indifference to them. At last he gave way to their importunity because he could not help himself, and on the day of St. Simon and St. Jude he sailed back to the fertile territory which the Indios had called Veragua. But an uninterrupted succession of thunderstorms drove him back again to the Gulf of Chiriqui, and for weeks he fought against the fury of the elements. "I was so exhausted," he writes, "that I no longer knew what to do. My old wounds broke out, and for nine whole days I had

lost all hope of clinging to life. Never were the waves so high, so frightful and so foaming,—the water looked like blood, and seemed to boil like a cauldron on a gigantic fire. Never had the sky worn so monstrous an aspect, it glowed like an oven and sent forth such burning rays that every moment I looked to see whether my masts and sails had not been singed." Certainly the situation was bad enough; that part of the Atlantic Ocean is, at certain periods of the year, continuously visited by devastating tornadoes, but it may be noted how his imagination riots in apocalyptic pictures.

At the beginning of January, 1503, he landed on the coast of Veragua after he had spent thirty-five days in covering a stretch of thirty sea miles. The ships, now little more than battered hulks, were in such a state that they could hardly be refitted, the crews were prostrate from disease and exhaustion, so he decided to sail up the estuary of a great river which he christened the Bethlehem River, where they could, in some measure, recover from the toils of the sea. The Indios gave the intruders a hostile welcome; probably reports had spread from tribe to tribe that these were treacherous men and given to violence, and much diplomacy was necessary to incline them to be peaceable. They had plates of gold, and tubes of gold, and also a few bars of unworked gold: but this was nothing. The Spaniards asked where the gold mines were: there must be mines everywhere, and they cared no longer

for such petty gains. The Indios appeared to understand: up in the mountains the forests were full of gold, said they, so up in the mountains the Spaniards must go. But to find that gold the men must first prepare themselves by fasting and chastity, and it seems they made a pretence of doing so. This was, in fact, a pious invention of the Admiral, the only means of curbing his followers' unbridled greed. Bartholomé broke into the interior with a well-armed body of men, made the acquaintance of various chiefs, who received him with reserved good-will, and although they appeared disposed to satisfy the strangers' incomprehensible desire for gold, they were obviously on their guard. They were quite unlike the natives of the archipelago, or the islands farther out; life on the mainland breathed a dignified austerity. It was as if the life of the islands made the people more light-hearted and playful, more dreamy and confiding; here they were sterner and weightier folk.

The *Adelantado* did, in the event, find gold in the primeval forest, in the rock and in the marshes, but not so much as was expected. They searched and searched, made enquiry after enquiry, and, indeed, it seems that a certain cacique, called in the narratives Quibian (the names are always distorted), in order to rid himself of these insatiable gold seekers, craftily led them into the territory of one of his enemies: and there they dug and burrowed. They went on digging and burrowing until they

almost dissolved in their own sweat. Every find stirred the expectation of a greater one: what they found was never enough; they grew quite mad, and dreamed and told stories of great blocks of massy gold. The Admiral took every occasion of stimulating their greed, for thus they were occupied and he had leisure for his geographico-mystical meditations. People who are thus possessed have a special guardian angel whose task it is to keep the truth from them. Had he not had this fixed idea of Asia and Zipangu eternally revolving in his mind, he would have been able to achieve with very little trouble what the determined Balboa did ten years later: two days' journey over the mountains and he would have been in sight of the Pacific Ocean. Then, indeed, the foundation upon which he stood, and which sustained him in all his sorrow and disillusion, would have collapsed beneath him.

The practical notion that emerged while they were in Veragua came from Bartholomé. He marked the luxuriant fertility of the land and said to himself that here were inexhaustible possibilities for civilising work, offering prospects of wealth quite other than what might be won by this lunatic hunt for gold. He suggested to his brother that they should form a settlement in the place, and declared himself willing to remain there with the crews of two ships; the Admiral was to go back to Spain and work up support for the colony.

Columbus, unexpectedly, expressed his warm agreement with the plan. Huts and warehouses were erected, the teeming earth yielded enough, and more than enough, for all their daily needs, so that the question of supplies caused them no anxiety. Their only trouble was the attitude of the natives. As they were intelligent and courteous, Bartholomé had hoped that they would raise no difficulties to his plan of a settlement: and, in fact, to begin with they did leave the strangers to construct their mysterious buildings in peace. The *Adelantado* had already chosen eighty men and told them off to build a number of low houses of trimmed logs, roofed with palm leaves, on some rising ground about a bow-shot from the bank of the river Belen. These men were soon guilty of the usual brutalities against the Indios and their women. They were beyond all control. A warning that they must treat these honest and sensitive savages with consideration, or, at the very least, deal with them as though they were human beings, roused their scorn: only when they were confronted with superior force, and compelled by fear, did they restrain themselves, but the Indios' delusive friendliness always made them behave shamelessly from the very outset. Such was their behaviour here, too, and the issue was the usual one. The Indios drew back; their feelings were hurt, and, now realising with whom they had to deal, they began to prepare for war, and allied themselves with

neighbouring tribes, announcing that they were under the necessity of dealing with an enemy in the interior; but the extreme secrecy of their activity and demeanour aroused the Spaniards' suspicions. (They are always full of moral indignation when the consequences of their brutality begin to appear, and they must reap what they have sown.) Bartholomé's idea was to anticipate the expected attack, but he first wanted to make quite certain of the Indios' hostile intentions. Diego Mendez, who made a sport of such enterprises and was bold and adroit, made his way into the Indian village as a spy: and he ascertained that the Council of the tribes had decided on the expulsion of the white men. The *Adelantado* hesitated no longer: he surprised the town by night and seized the cacique and his wife and children. Experience had taught him that this was the most effective way of paralysing the savages' activity. However, the chief succeeded in escaping while he was being brought back, and alarmed the tribe. The infuriated warriors forced their way into the colony, and the Spaniards could only defend themselves against their superior numbers by the assistance of their bloodhounds which they, fortunately for them as it turned out, had not omitted to bring with them: but the worst of the situation was that they were cut off from the Admiral who had with much trouble succeeded in getting his ships out of the river mouth, which was growing shallow owing to

the prolonged drought, into the gulf. He, too, was quite overcome with dismay and horror when he was informed that the crew of the vessel which he had sent up the narrow river to collect wood and water for the voyage had been massacred by the Indios to the last man. Upon this, the *Adelantado's* people declared that they would not stay a day longer in that dangerous land; his entreaties were as vain as his anger; they rushed on to the ship, which ran aground in the shallow estuary; the Indios waded into the water and swam after them, and they had to defend themselves against their pursuers' furious onslaught behind a palisade on the open shore. The Admiral could not come to their assistance; he could not again drive his dilapidated craft through the breakers, and the only other vessel he had—the one he had sent upstream—was lost. A day passed, and yet another; the men on shore were nearly worn out by the Indios' attacks; yet what could he do to rescue them? Truly a dramatic situation, full of peril, not undeserved, and not calculated to inspire any kind of hope for the future. One terrible reminder he could not ignore: he had some Indian prisoners on board who were confined in the hold of the ship; when they were visited on the third morning it was discovered that they had all hanged themselves with cables. Many of them were touching the ground with their knees, others had strangled themselves, tightening the noose around their neck by the help of their

own feet, as their arms were bound, an obstinate proof that they feared death less than slavery. In the meantime the *Adelantado's* position grew steadily worse; some means had to be found of at least establishing communications with him and his diminishing band of men, as from the Admiral's ships they could only see men fighting and falling; they could not make themselves heard. Whereupon a heroic sailor, by name Pedro Laderma, offered to swim through the breakers, and the perilous attempt succeeded. In their mad despair the men implored him to tell the Admiral that he must take them on board again at any price. Laderma swam back; for the second time he succeeded and delivered his message. Columbus could not, of course, refuse: he cared but little for the colony, but he was cast down at the prospect of going back to Spain without any cogent reason for so speedy a return, for he could not justify it to his conscience. Still, it would be good to go home, though there was no home for him, only a place where he might rest, a corner in which he might lie down: he was tired,—he was tired at last, worn out by all the hardship and misery he had endured, and for the first time the prospect of dying in a bed seemed very tempting. Every freshening breeze imperilled his worm-eaten vessels, and his melancholia, exasperated by fever and want of sleep, now produced delusions in which he heard supernatural voices promising him consolation and

eternal rest. Nor was this sickly depression of mind relieved when after superhuman exertions he at last extricated Bartholomé and his people and their few remaining supplies out of their shattered craft, and got them on board the other vessels by means of a raft constructed at great risk in the face of imminent danger. Diego Mendez, who had so distinguished himself in the affair, was placed in command of the caravel whose captain had perished in the accident to the vessel.

But all this was merely the beginning of incredible hardships, and not until the full extent of them is known can the man's strong soul be seen in its true splendour. Therein lies his greatness and his glory: his pride, his patience, his acceptance—a profound, and, of course, quite unconscious acceptance—of his fate, as though he moved in a world not ours.

At the end of April, a favourable wind made it possible to leave the fatal gulf. The ships seemed constantly on the verge of foundering, and the timbers under water looked like honeycombs. It was therefore essential to take the shortest route for Española, and the greatest care was needed to avoid the numerous coral reefs. Further storms: three anchors were lost, the sails were torn to shreds, the leaks grew larger, the pumps were continuously in use, and, even so, the water had to be bailed out with pails and kettles. One of the ships began to sink, the crew were taken on board by the two

others, and when the latter could be barely kept afloat—God be thanked!—land came in sight. The Admiral gave orders to bring the ships in to about two hundred feet offshore, and then they were made fast, one beside the other: they were full of water up to the decks. As the attitude of the natives was hostile, covered blockhouses were constructed at the fore and after parts of the battered vessels, and everything was, so far as possible, put in a position of defence. No one was to leave the improvised fortresses without special permission, and to prevent the customary excesses, intercourse with the Indios was regulated by exact instructions. It was the island of Jamaica on which they had run ashore,—one of the most populous and fertile of the Antilles group. The harbour was soon swarming with Indian boats laden with provisions, and the Admiral opened negotiations that led to the usual process of barter. But they could not get enough; the sailors found they could not live on cassava and maize. They would have it that the crafty Indios had hidden their best supplies,—and if Diego Mendez had not once more understood how to smooth over the difficulties by his conciliatory attitude, there would have been open strife at the very outset: for under such conditions no specific cause is necessary to produce a flaming outbreak, and it is a remarkable fact of experience, confirmed in the course of most polar expeditions, that the continued association of a body of men

under discipline leads inevitably, first to secret vendettas, and lastly to devastating outbreaks of mysterious hatred.

Diego Mendez seems to have been a godsend to Columbus. Imperturbable, energetic, a trifle bombastic, but endowed with a certain sturdy sense of reality, many traits in his character, except his remarkable courage, recall Sancho Panza. His friendliness and frankness made him very popular among the Indios, and their liking for him went so far that one of the caciques gave him a huge canoe made out of a gigantic hollowed tree trunk. Mendez had, indeed, intrigued to get it: he tarred the boat, fitted it with a mast and sail, and persuaded Captain Fiesco, a fellow countryman of the Admiral, and seven Indios with whom he had become friendly, to agree to sail with him to Española, and in the name of his master appeal to the governor for help. The distance was seven hundred kilometres. Columbus fully realised that it was the only possibility of rescue and with a heavy heart gave his consent, for Mendez had made himself almost indispensable.

As it turned out, hardly had Mendez left Jamaica, than the situation became acute. The Indios—why, is not exactly ascertainable—were very reluctant to produce supplies. (There is a suggestion in some obscure chronicle that they had not forgiven Mendez for taking away a number of their fellows, which seemed to point to an amazingly developed

sense of social solidarity: however, the point cannot now be determined.) The position of these unfortunate men was now intolerable. Every one on board was penned up in a narrow space with nothing to do; the damp tropical climate exasperated their nerves; many of them were cursing and raving in feverish delirium, many sat with their faces fixed in a stupefied stare, and the *Adelantado* himself fell into a state of dumb apathy. The first to pull themselves together were Porras and his younger brother, one of the mates: they suggested seizing seven or eight boats from the Indios and trying to reach Española without the Admiral. Without the Admiral,—that was the main thing, for they had gradually come to regard him as the embodiment of all their ill luck. The plot was discovered or betrayed, and the result was a mutiny; Columbus, who had for two and a half months been lying sick in his cabin, tended by his brother and his son, poured forth warnings and exhortations, but in vain. The men were beside themselves: they threatened the author of their torments with death, and after a dreadful scene, they were induced by a dozen of their number, who remained loyal, to leave the island peaceably. Forty-eight men embarked on ten canoes which the Admiral had bought from the Indios, and rowed eastwards along the coast, stealing and plundering where they could, and when at last they reached the open sea, a furious storm drove them back on to the shores of

Jamaica. All the boats were dashed to pieces, and those who succeeded in getting to land, some thirty-five in number, ranged over the country like a band of outlaws, spreading fire and slaughter, a scourge to the Indios, moving from village to village in the evenings or at night. It is conceivable that the caciques who were visited by this plague asked help from the Admiral against the bandits, and as he was not in a position to give it, they stopped supplies by raising quite legitimately the market prices to an exorbitant level, and contemptuously rejected the articles offered by way of barter.

In this extremity Columbus had an inspiration. From the calendar of Regiomontanus which he had with him, he knew that there would be a total eclipse of the moon on February 29. He sent an Indian interpreter to the chief cacique and invited him to an assembly on the day of the heavenly phenomenon. When they had all arrived, Columbus arose and began a solemn address. He said that he and his companions were under the protection of an almighty God who rewarded the good and punished the wicked. This God—Lord of the thunder and the lightning, the sun, the moon, and the stars—was very angry because the inhabitants of Janahica had allowed His worshippers and white favourites to suffer from hunger. If they did not mend their ways, fire would fall from Heaven and spread destruction on them and on their families: and as a sign of His fury He would, on the following

night, look down upon them with a bloody countenance, and then hide Himself behind a black veil of tears until they had solemnly undertaken to furnish His faithful son Christobal Colón with sufficient food. This astronomical conjuring trick, which displays the Admiral, as it were, under the limelight, in the tragi-comic rôle that came so natural to him, had the desired effect. As darkness began to fall he withdrew to his cabin, giving out that he must speak with his God for a space: the moon rose from the ocean flushed with scarlet, and was then veiled in darkness: at the sight of this the Indios fell into a shuddering terror, rushed shrieking to their canoes, fetched such supplies as they had by them, and promised to do all that the Admiral wanted if he would only ask the Lord of Heaven not to be angry with them any longer. Whereupon, when the moon stood clear once more against the firmament, their lamentations turned into cries of joy, and thenceforward they reverenced Columbus as a great magician who must stand in God's special favour, for what had been decided in Heaven was known to him on earth.

This occurrence is described in great detail by Hernando Colón, who, as a boy, was actually present. Whether it happened exactly thus, or only more or less as it is narrated, and whether the recollection of later years has done its usual dishonest editorial work upon the facts, it is not possible now to say. It is astonishing enough that

Hernando has only scanty and inconsiderable records of such a journey which, for a boy of his age, must have been an overwhelming and unforgettable experience. Otherwise we should perhaps know the whole truth about his father, that truth —now for ever lost—in all its abysmal horror or its solemn splendour, a truth at which we can now only grope and guess. As things are, we must treat the assertions of that age with caution, as the men of those times were not merely seldom burdened with the organ of truth, but they were also entirely without the organ of observation. We of to-day, of course, believe that we have left this state of childish undevelopment behind us: but we do not know how we shall be judged upon the matter in five hundred years' time.

In the meantime, Diego Mendez achieved the impossible: he reached Española on his tiny vessel. He landed at Cape Tiburon and learned that the governor Ovando had gone with an armed force to Xaragua in yet another effort to destroy the rebellious tribes. He immediately started off, made his way on foot to Xaragua, fell in with Ovando, and handed him the Admiral's letter. Ovando made all sorts of excuses, alleged he had no ships, put off from day to day and week to week the orders that he should have issued immediately, and the easy-going Mendez allowed himself, by God knows

what arts and pretexts, to be kept in suspense for seven long months until the governor had completely routed the Indios. This victory he celebrated according to the best Spanish colonial tradition: he had eighty-four of the chiefs hanged, beheaded, burnt, and quartered, among them being the Queen Anacaona, the Penthesilea of the Western Continent. But as he then still hesitated, Mendez' patience was at an end, his conscience smote him, and he announced his intention of chartering a ship in San Domingo for the Admiral's account and sending it to Jamaica laden with the most essential supplies. Ovando was unwilling, however, to let matters come to this, not in the least because he felt ashamed, but he had to consider the queen's disapproval, and as for the king, no one ever knew how the wind was blowing at Court. So he instructed Diego de Escobar to take a small galley then lying in the harbour ready for sea, and carry a message to the Admiral. No more? Only a message? Well, we shall hear. The message was a very elaborate document, full of dubious consolation, in which Ovando assured the Admiral that at that moment there was no ship at Española of a tonnage sufficient to accommodate the shipwrecked company. The choice of Escobar was significant enough. He was one of Roldan's fellow conspirators, had been condemned to death by the Admiral, and released by Bobadilla; Columbus could expect no good from him. He acquitted himself of his

task in the spirit of his master. He landed not far off the point where the wrecks lay engulfed in the sand; but the Admiral's and the men's violent outburst of joy at the sight of the ship left him unmoved. What he brought with him was (it seems incredible, but it is confirmed by the evidence), a small cask of wine, and a piece of mouldy bacon for the Admiral: he handed over the letter, and requested him to deliver his answer for the *Governador* at once, as he had to weigh anchor for the return voyage that very night.

It is possible that Ovando had ordered Escobar to take the Admiral alone and tell the others that they would be fetched later: it is possible that this was communicated to Columbus and that he refused to abandon his companions in misfortune. Most of the chroniclers incline to this view: at any rate, it gives them an opportunity of celebrating their hero's noble-minded self-abnegation. But the letter, which he wrote to the Governor of Española, forces us to the view that he knew nothing of such an intention on the part of Ovando, and if the governor's honour is a matter of any interest, only the supposition remains open that Escobar, revengeful and malicious, had simply suppressed the order he had received. The Admiral's letter was couched in the most imploring terms. Only a beggar or a saint can so humiliate himself. "I know, most honoured Señor," he writes, "that you would adventure in person to my rescue,—of that I am

as surely convinced as of my own life. I am still living in the wreck of my stranded ship, and not on a thousand pages could I write down all the hardships, misery, and distress that I have endured; —next to that of God, I am certain of your help, and for it all my descendants will owe you their gratitude."

Procrastinate as he might, Ovando had to rescue the Admiral some time. Even within his own sphere of authority the Admiral's adherents would put pressure upon him to which he was bound to yield. However, it was June before a larger caravel appeared off Jamaica: it came almost at the same time as the ship that Diego Mendez had fitted out. Columbus later on celebrated this day as the happiest in his life. The destiny that the gods reserved for him had, so he might well believe, brought upon him all this bitter hardship to try him to the end of his endurance. But even so, the resources of the Higher Powers are not easily exhausted, as he was soon to find.

He had to be allowed a considerable stay in Española to recover his health. When the island rose up out of the sea, with its lovely hills, its blooming meadows, its shimmering streams, its many-hued rocks, its mighty primeval forests, its crystalline air, so that the whole scene looked like a magical landscape in a blissful dream, it seems he was so deeply moved that he could not speak for hours. He stayed three months on his beloved

island. And what he saw and went through in that time, must have made him long with his whole heart, assuming indeed that he had a beating heart, for death—death whom he had seen so terribly near at hand for all those years.

In an ancient document there is the following passage: "Though the worst cruelties to the Indios had already begun under the authority of Bobadilla, Nicolás de Ovando, indeed, made ready to surpass his predecessors in every shameful thing that men could do to their fellows." That is a true statement without the slightest qualification.

With the new governor's fleet, containing some thirty ships in all, there were an unusually large number of fresh arrivals. There were among them certain conscienceless speculators who had indeed themselves nothing to lose, but induced others who were not so destitute to entrust them with their money. There were credulous visionaries, who adventured all their possessions in fitting out a ship, so that they might be hailed among the conquistadors of the New World. There were some who intended to satisfy their creditors in the Old World with the proceeds of their crimes and robberies in the new one.

"They were not merely humble folk that could be seen making their way to the mines," says Las Casas; "but men of a better class, who had a coat

to wear and boots upon their feet, trudging along with a servant behind them to carry their tools; a few Hidalgoes even appeared on horseback, with their squire riding behind them on a mule, for they considered it beneath their dignity to burden their own backs with the cumbersome sacks for the gold they were to find. They would try and outstrip each other to get to gold-digging, for they thought that the gold could be picked up easily and quickly like apples from a tree."

Disillusion was not long in coming. As might have been expected, the sorely disappointed immigrants made the streets and roads unsafe; they tramped begging through the settlements and the newly colonised towns, lay stricken with fever in the hospitals, beset the offices of government and, when they had a few coins to spare, they asked for large grants of land for as little as they could be made to pay, where they could play the gentleman on their own estates, and even pose as slave owners.

The full powers conferred on the Governor Ovando by the Cabinet decree of December 20, 1503, by which the Indios were not to be treated as actually slaves—such was the Jesuitical stipulation—but might be compelled to work, left him a fairly free hand to make such dispositions as he chose. He allowed every Spaniard thirty to sixty Indios for the cultivation of the ground and the exploitation of the mines. The fixed daily wage was a mere

trifle; the period of forced labour was first settled at six and then eight months in the year. The men were taken from their families hundreds of kilometres away, and whipped to their toil like cattle. They had to bring their rations with them, and when the Spaniards had their meals, the starving Indios crawled under the table and waited until a bone was thrown to them; and when they had gnawed and sucked it dry, they crushed it between stones and mixed the meal with their wretched cassava bread. If they ran away to escape this inhuman treatment, they were hunted down by the trained bloodhounds, and when caught they were cruelly punished, and thenceforward had to do their work in iron fetters. Most of them died before their service was over. They were seldom allowed to go home after the expiration of their term of service—some treacherous pretext was always found for keeping them at work. And when at last they were set free, they were as a rule too exhausted to reach their villages. "I have seen many dead lying by the way," relates Las Casas; "and those still alive had dragged themselves into the shade of a tree and were screaming as they fought each other for bread." Those who were able to hold out, and managed to get home, found their huts abandoned, their plantations wrecked, and every one fled, for none dared face the "White Terror."

Then came the expeditions against the Indios.

After the death of Behechio, Cacique of Xaragua, his sister Anacaona succeeded to his authority. She had gone so far in her rash predilection for the whites, in which there was probably an erotic element, that she had encouraged the marriage of her lovely daughter to the young Spanish nobleman, Guevara. The malignant treachery which he soon after practised upon her and upon his wife had destroyed her exalted opinion of the strangers: when Roldan and his accomplices let loose their fury upon the Indios like a pack of bandits, she entirely withdrew from any intercourse with the white men, and the persistent oppression of Bobadilla and Ovando turned her earlier friendship into inextinguishable hatred.

The Indios of the Xaragua province were reckoned as the finest specimens of the whole population. Las Casas remarks that they far surpass the other natives in the gracefulness of their speech, the sweetness of their manners, and the beauty of their persons. Such men were not made for forced labour. They loved idleness and contemplation: born and nurtured in a beautiful country which easily supplied their natural wants, they took the gifts of Nature as they came, and had no understanding of European methods and systems of labour. Not without interest is Humboldt's observation that in the very first years of the colonisation it became clear that the American race was notably inferior to the Caucasian, and still more so

to the African race, in adaptability and physical endurance.

Ovando's first endeavour was to rid himself of the menace of Anacaona and her following, and he did it after a fashion that branded, or should have branded, the Christian Spaniards forever in the New World. (What remains of their guilt to-day? It is utterly forgotten.) He sent to her to announce his visit, telling her that he came in friendship to make certain arrangements regarding the tribute, on which account he asked that her subject caciques might be invited to be present. This was done: Anacaona went to meet him with a large following and received him with the gracious words for which she was famous. The Spaniards—three hundred men on foot and sixty horsemen, a levy that should have startled the Indian Princess—were lavishly feasted and provided with all manner of fantastic entertainments: dances and games were performed for their amusement, and it seemed as though Anacaona hoped that her hospitality would produce beneficent results for her people. But it suited Ovando to conceive a suspicion that these preparations were a cover for treachery. I say, it suited him, because he had not the slightest ground for it and he needed a pretext. It is unlikely that a thousand naked Indios armed only with bows would venture to attack steel-armoured Spaniards, bristling with weapons, apart from the fact that they would have violated the sacred claims of

guest-law. However, it is recorded in certain sources that he gave an audience to some persons who alleged they had evidence of a conspiracy. So he decided to anticipate it, and by way of returning the Indios' courtesy, he likewise invited them to a feast, the main attraction of which was to be a tournament, in which his competitors were to use, instead of spears, bamboo shafts, that broke easily on their armour and shields. At the same time the knights and squires were instructed to keep their swords concealed near by and so soon as the agreed sign was given, they were to fall upon the assembled crowd and cut down every one within reach. The same instructions were given to the men on foot who were to dispose themselves among the spectators on the terraces that enclosed the arena. He had had comfortable seats prepared for Anacaona and the principal caciques in his own palm-roofed house. He appeared in person with his officers in the arena and threw the discus with them. Then he took up his stand near the princess on the balcony of the house, which he had, unperceived, surrounded with armed men. Scarcely had the lance-play begun, amid the delighted shouts of the innocent spectators, than Ovando approached the parapet of the balcony and grasped the cross of the Order of Alcantara, which he wore round his neck: it was the signal for the massacre, in which neither women nor children nor old men were allowed to escape. The house was surrounded and the caciques

within it were captured to a man, and with their hands bound behind their backs were hanged from the crossbeams and tortured until they produced the required confession, *viz.*, that they were in the plot against Ovando's life and authority. The details of the tortures may be passed over: why depict all the horrors,—how they were roasted over burning braziers, torn with red-hot pincers, their mouths filled with molten lead; we know it all from a thousand original sources and a thousand descriptions, it is the A B C of every Inquisition, and our imagination is hardened against it: it was all so long ago and the methods are so primitive compared with the more refined arts of murder that have been discovered since. It should be considered merely as an historical curiosity. The house, too, after Ovando had gallantly escorted his prisoner Anacaona into safety, was set on fire at all four corners, as a result of which forty, and according to other reports, eighty caciques and important Indios were burnt alive. Evidence was manufactured against the Indian chieftainess, she was charged with high treason, tortured, and, having regard to her position (*por hazelle honra*, as the formula goes), was condemned, not to be burnt at the stake, but to be hanged upon a gallows specially erected for her benefit.

Then began the systematic extermination of the Indios thus deprived of their leaders. I quote the chief eyewitness, Las Casas: "If it chanced that

certain Christians, whether from kindness or greed of gain, seized upon an Indian child and took it away with them on their horses, another rode up behind them and ran it through with his lance. A few Indios, who escaped the bloodbath of Xaragua, fled in their canoes to the island Guanabo that lay eight leagues away. They were condemned by the *Governador* to slavery for life, and any Spaniard was allowed to hunt them down and capture them. I have seen them burnt alive, torn to pieces, and put to all manner of elaborate torments. The tale of horrors is so long that I am not able to write it down. Only one thing will I say, and bear witness thereto before my God and my conscience, that the Indios gave not the smallest occasion for this treatment, they were innocent of the slightest guilt, and never committed any crime upon the Christians that deserved death. Indeed, only a few of them indulged in any vengeance or reprisal against such bloody devils as these Christians: I knew most of them very well and they were hardly wilder or more intractable than twelve-year-old boys. The war against them had no shadow of justice in it, but the Christians were so hellish cruel and unjust (*fueron todas diabolicos ed injustissimas*), more than any blackguardly tyrant that ever lived. All these things I saw with my own eyes, and I feared to repeat them because I could hardly trust myself, and was doubtful whether I had not dreamed it all."

There was a warlike tribe in the mountains, the Higneys, which neither Columbus' captains, nor the *Adelantado*, nor Bobadilla had succeeded in reducing and subjecting to tribute. Against them Ovando sent his captain, Juan de Esquibel, and although these Indios displayed a boldness and contempt for death that amazed the Spaniards themselves, who had formerly fought against the Moors, the veteran Esquibel so completely mastered them that after a few months he had rooted them out to the last man, old and young alike. He began by hunting down their wives and children whom they had hidden in the woods and caves. With the help of bloodhounds it was not difficult. They were slaughtered, impaled, mutilated, and burnt by the hundred, so that the land reeked like a shambles. The men, who after a series of desperately heroic battles had been driven to one refuge after another, fled further and further into the wilderness, and a last band of six or seven hundred was, by Esquibel's command, driven to the edge of a deep rocky gorge, and flung into it to a man.

After this victory Ovando founded a town on the coast of Xaragua, to which he gave the name of *Santa Maria de la verdura paz*. "Of true peace." He meant, presumably, the peace of the graveyard. If he meant any other, he must have been an even more hideous monster than his deeds suggest.

It is an inveterate European tradition that syphilis was introduced into the Old World by the first conquerors and settlers from America. The fact is by no means indisputable, but if it is based on truth, one may perceive in it the immanent vengeance of this desecrated, brutally maltreated, and inhumanly down-trodden race,—a dark deed of compensating justice. In point of fact, so far as my knowledge goes, there is not the slightest indication in any of the countless historical sources that a disease of this kind was prevalent among the Indios: it may, indeed, be the case that those first attacked by it were too ashamed to mention it, and that medical ignorance was then so great that most of them took their trouble to the confessor rather than to the doctor, and the appalling hygienic conditions of the age enabled the disease to spread with such devastating rapidity. It may also be true that, localised as it had been for centuries in America, in the years of discovery a germ that was near extinction was suddenly stirred to raging virulence by transfusion into alien blood.

However the facts may be, Europe balanced the account, if, indeed, this dreadful indebtedness was hers, with interest a thousandfold, and gave a lavish return for everything she took away. She paid it with the smallpox, from which millions and millions of the original inhabitants perished in South America from the Amazon to Patagonia.

She paid it with compulsory Catholicism—its *auto-da-fés*, its anathemas, and strangulation of every sort of free development: with compulsory civilisation, that created ruinous needs, and destroyed many sane and excellent, as well as barbarous customs: and, above all, she paid it back with alcohol, her most lavish and most deadly gift, which in the course of less than two hundred years reduced the entire Indian population of the north to that impotence of mind and soul as a result of which they were robbed of their culture—so mysterious, because it was embedded in the darkest epochs of human history—their freedom, their land, and their existence.

It will not do to say that the ancient narratives should be left alone: as though it were superfluous and futile to breathe life into them, to conjure them from their graves, as though they had no importance for us and threw no light upon the social, political, or religious systems of to-day. This is a fallacy and a self-complacent delusion. For the past is only apparently past. Everything is, and persists. The present, which is the first moment of the future, is the last moment of the past. And because it is so, no human responsibilities can be shifted or annulled; nor can the passage of time nor the succession of generations make them of no account.

After nine tenths of the original population of Española had been exterminated, and the Spaniards had rid themselves of the embarrassment of continued risings, they found themselves involved in another difficulty: a shortage of labour. To deal with this, they hit upon the plan of transporting French Negroes from Senegambia. The most remarkable fact about this proposal is that it emanated from that very Las Casas who contended with so much devotion for the rights of the Indios. The proposition that he put before the Spanish Court and the Ministry of the Colonies was that to relieve the burden on the decimated native population every colonist should be allowed to import two Negroes and two Negresses. This way out of the difficulty was seriously considered in high places, and it led directly to the infamous *assientos*, the agreements for the importation of Negroes, which the Spanish Government concluded later on with the trading houses of Peralta, Reynez, and Elvas.

The friends of humanity are peculiar people, even when one of them is endowed with so warm a heart as the priest Las Casas; to save the copper-coloured folk he sacrifices the black-skinned people without a qualm. Las Casas was the most fervent admirer of Columbus. Was there perhaps a mysterious influence at work—had his disciple caught his master's mentality? Had the Indio and his martyrdom become an " obsession " to Las Casas too—a

concept and no longer a reality? Ideas are destructive in all circumstances, even when they are meant to serve humanity.

And yet Columbus wrote on his last journey home: "I can never think of Española without tears."

CHAPTER THE LAST

The Saddest of All

Columbus sailed back to Spain on the meanest ship available: but this seemed so suited to his condition that he made no more complaint. Ovando treated him with complete callousness,—without the slightest regard for his years and services. His current revenues and dividends were either not collected, or he was refused an account of them. There were grounds for the accusation that Ovando had not merely neglected Columbus' affairs, but also placed every conceivable hindrance in the way of those who were acting on his behalf. Columbus could not even secure payment of the confiscated gold.

The passage was stormy, and on the second day out a sudden blast of wind carried away the caravel's mainmast. Bartholomé had to take over the command; Columbus was kept a prisoner in his bed by attacks of intolerable pain. When he was carried off the ship in November, 1504, at San Lucar de Barramede, his body was shattered and his spirit almost extinguished.

There was naturally no question of any ceremonious reception or the like. No one was even

there to bid him welcome. The faithful Bartholomé was with him, and Hernando, but they alone; and they looked round vainly in search of a friend. The Admiral of the Ocean had plainly no more friends in Spain. He was a poor shipwrecked mariner, whose name was already half forgotten, and whose plans, hopes, and experiences, and the circumstances in which he lived, were a matter of indifference to the Spanish people. He went to Seville and lodged in a seaman's tavern. He began to write letters, spending hours, days, and nights in the process,—writing indefatigably. They were a mass of recriminations, resuscitations of the past, statements of the wrongs and injustice he had suffered, endless complaints, verbose grievances. The majority of the letters were addressed to his son, Diego, who was with the Court at Medina del Campo. They survive in the original text.

Diego, thinks the Admiral, is popular at Court; he can use his influence on his father's behalf, for nothing can be achieved there without influence and intrigue. He directs him how to proceed, recommends him humbly to his ancient patron, the former Dominican of Deza, and now Bishop of Palencia. He reckons, counts, calculates, adds, and laments over the sums of money that have been withheld from him and that he would have had at his disposal if all had gone well. "I will not have it supposed that it is only the forty thousand gold pesos that are still outstanding, I call heaven to

witness (but do not repeat this), that my annual loss amounts to ten millions." Incorrigible visionary! He has been cheated out of Ophir, the Chersonesus Aurea, and the wealth of Crœsus. He proposes that the king shall indemnify him for his loss. "If any man thinks that I lie, I would refer him to the Paraleipomen, the Book of Kings, Josephus' 'De Antiquitatis', and many others. Greet Diego Mendez for me, I hope his love of truth and his zeal may have as much weight as the lies of both the Porras. When you write to me, send the letters to Luis de Soria, who will send them on to me, for if I travel I shall have to take the Plata road through Salamanca. May our Lord keep you under His holy protection. Your uncle, Bartholomé, is suffering grievously from toothache."

Every week he sends a courier, with orders and instructions, excuses himself, on the ground of illness, for not yet having been able to come to Court, as though his presence there was ardently desired. Impatience and suspicion make him querulous and officious.

"It is urgent that someone should see to our business, they are fools to neglect it—India is being destroyed, a thousand places are in flames, no one in this country dares to say a word for me, I am living on credit, the little money I had I was forced to spend on those who came with me: it was a matter of conscience not to leave the poor people without help. You must be sure to see the Lord

Bishop of Palencia and tell him what great confidence I have in his goodness, and observe the same demeanour with the Lord Chancellor."

Then he impresses on Diego the importance of continually maintaining the family connections.

"It is important that your uncle and your brother should kiss Their Majesties' hands, you may count on your brother, he has a good disposition and already possesses the qualities of a grown man. Ten brothers would not be too many for you,—I have never found better friends than my brothers in good fortune or bad."

Anxiety over his incomings outweighs all else. "I am leaving behind me a writing from which you can see what belongs to me. The agreements have not been kept. Everybody sends merchandise home as they please, and the result is that the tax of one-eighth is not collected. The eighth belongs to me, together with the third part of the revenue on the spot, and the tenth part of what falls to Their Majesties, and of the yield of gold and all other matters within the boundaries of my Admiralty. See to it: it is the Master's eye that keeps the horse fat."

If he is left without news for a few days he becomes excited and suspicious. "Messengers from the Court arrive here every day, everyone receives letters, but I do not, and I grow very anxious."

He worries over what ships are in port, and which are about to set sail: he wants a watch kept over all

harbours, so that no one shall be allowed to go to India without special permission and authority, as he was afraid that this might involve him in the loss of his revenues, as though the whole of America was to be put under a customs control for his benefit. He learns that the gold that he had brought back for the Crown was being kept in thatched huts "among a discontented population" as he expresses himself: and this upsets him: measures must be taken to guard it properly.

On November 24 Queen Isabella died at Medina del Campo. On December 13 he writes to Diego: "It is much spoken of here that the Queen expressed the wish on her death-bed that the possession of India should be given back to me." It was the dream and the longing of his latter years, and he seriously believed that Isabella had no other thought in her last hours. In any case, the king must be reminded of his duties towards the Admiral to whom the dead queen had been so much attached. "I shall ask the gentlemen of the Ministry for India to see to it that *Governador* Ovando is asked to send my gold with that destined for His Majesty. He is not to be allowed to evade doing so. The money that has come in since my departure must be seven to eight thousand pesos, apart from the other sums that have been withheld from me."

He fears calumniators, notably all persons returning from Española, and tries to ensure that they

shall not damage him with the king. "Camacho and Bernal, two abandoned wretches, are about to go to Court, probably with evil intentions. This Bernal was the originator of all the treachery against me and he was thrown into prison and charged with many crimes for every one of which he deserved to be beheaded. At your uncle's request I pardoned him on condition that he never again stirred up trouble against me and my authority. He has forfeited this pardon and can be looked upon as a convicted person. I send you a copy of the judgment against him. Diego Mendez knows him well—do but ask him. It is said that to revenge himself for some trifle, he poisoned two people."

He goes on in this tone until May, when he was at last able to travel to the Court at Segovia. It is the language of a choleric, quarrelsome old man, pursued by real and imaginary enemies, the fear of fraud, intrigue, and plots, even in his restless sleep at nights.

Every letter is signed as follows:

S.
S.A.S.
X.M.Y.
X P O F E R E N S.

There is no indication as to the meaning of these letters, although in his will he lays upon his son the

duty of retaining the signature. It is probably a mystical contrivance (Sanctus Christus, Sancta Maria, Sanctus Yosephus) concerned with the mysterious number seven: he has changed his Greek Christian name, Christophoros into the Latin form Christoferens.

It has always been uncertain whether his pathetic jeremiads on the poverty in which he was forced to live were founded on fact. Some historians maintain that they cannot be taken seriously, that he was not in any way robbed of his legitimate revenues, that the king had merely placed an embargo on them so that they might be used to pay the debts which the Admiral had accumulated everywhere. It is certainly the case that he lived alone in Seville, but it was only at first that he lived in a tavern; later on he moved into a comfortable lodging in the best quarter of the city. It is, moreover, an established fact that he had considerable credit with the Italian banking firms in Spain. In his letter of December 13 to Diego he mentions that he had given young Hernando a hundred and fifty ducats for his journey and that four thousand *castellanos* (some five and twenty thousand marks in our money) were to be paid out to him from the incomings then due.

There cannot, therefore, have been any question of want or distress. It is certainly probable that his Seville house was neither luxurious nor even comfortable. But this was not due to lack of

means, but because so parsimonious and austere a man could only exist in parsimony and austerity. One cannot sail the seas for years in cockleshells, at the mercy of every peril, endure the most dreadful hardships like the meanest of one's followers, and then one day set up house in careless pride of possession among the pursy citizens of Seville. He was not brought up to this, and it was not part of his temperament.

What, then, was the cause of this exertion, all this abuse and lamentations, these unceasing appeals, these frantic efforts to secure the revenues that were his due? It was not the commercial spirit that lay behind it all, though there were elements in his character that looked like an absurd caricature of that spirit. It was not avarice, of which he has been accused on many sides, though that was but a cover for more secret motives beneath: it was not his morbid hypochondria that must finally have poisoned his whole system: nor was it a resigned recognition of the worthlessness of the agreements he had made with the Spanish Crown, and the faithless caprice of those whose sense of duty and of justice should have maintained them. The reason lay deeper. It was the lamentable collapse of his inordinate hopes that drove him into these undignified demonstrations. If forty thousand or a hundred thousand, or a million pesos flowed into his pockets yearly from the colonies, what is that compared with his fairy

dream of inexhaustible wealth, the vision of the golden mountains of Paria and Zipangu? Of emerald temples and the golden palaces in the Empire of the Great Cham? Of the gold mines in the land of Ophir? The mere descent to actual reckoning is torture and disillusion. What, a New World, and it could do no more for him than enable him to maintain himself and provide for his sons! He, the discoverer of a half of the globe unknown since the beginning of Creation, he who had thrown into the lap of humanity a gift that could only have been expected from a god,—was he to haggle with officials and courtiers, struggle with treacherous governors, flatter the good will of insolent upstarts, and tremble lest he may not get the little that is his due? The favour of the king? This too is an unjust detraction from his dignity; he needs it not,—in his own silent thoughts he confronts the king as an equal: the Sovereign Lord of the New World. Anointed or unanointed, so clear a dispensation of God made this a matter of little moment. His conquering thoughts, reaching out into the future, had shown him a far different picture: poor impoverished Europe suddenly swimming in gold—lapped in a golden stream that Columbus had bidden to flow, Spain rejoicing, Genoa at his feet, a Periclean age ringing with Columbus' fame, Jerusalem freed, the Church triumphant, and he himself as the deliverer, the Saviour, the Messiah.

In this mortal strife between phantasy and reality we may discern his true image and understand his end.

On February 5 he informed his son that Amerigo Vespucci had visited him and that they had had much talk together. He says nothing as to the subject of their talk: the fact that the interview has not survived seems to me as great a loss as the destruction of an Armada, or the loss of a masterpiece of the Renaissance. If the words that passed between the two men still exist somewhere in the universe, as may be assumed, in the form of ether waves, perhaps, in some far-off planetary system, an attempt should be made to recover them. It is a pity that the necessary apparatus has not yet been discovered.

In this connection, mention should be made of an important historical injustice. Vespucci made two journeys to the American continent, one at the instance of Lorenzo de Medici in the year 1499, and one in the service of King Emmanuel of Portugal in the year 1503. The Latin account of the second expedition published in Strassburg in 1505 brought him a sensational reputation, and was the cause of the New World being named America. An important German scholar, Waldseemüller, a schoolmaster rather than a man of learning, first inscribed the name on a map he had prepared. But Columbus

had already discovered the Central American continent, or, to be more exact, the coast of Paria, in the year 1498, and in order to dispute this discovery, whether from jealousy of Columbus himself, or from a desire to please the Florentines, or from servility to the Portuguese king—or from some other dark motive, Vespucci's adherents dated his expedition back to the year 1497. This fraudulent alteration of the date was made clear when Diego Colón brought his action against the Spanish Crown to obtain his hereditary privileges. One of the many witnesses was Alonzo de Ojeda who had taken part in Vespucci's first voyages. He expressly emphasised in Court the priority of Columbus, and stated that he had himself seen the map of the ocean which the Admiral had then sent to their Majesties; it was only then that Vespucci had ventured to set out in the company of himself and of Juan de la Cosa. Amerigo Vespucci is certainly innocent of the whole manœuvre; he was a modest and high-minded man to whom the feeling of rivalry was unknown, and to whom it would not have occurred to darken the fame of his predecessor. The culprits are, rather, the uncritical historians and garrulous chroniclers, who in their eagerness for news, or their credulity, allowed this stubborn and ineradicable error to become historically current: it is found, for example, in the Brockhaus Encyclopædia of the year 1819. At that time in Spain there must have been a number of sworn

enemies and opponents of Columbus: they must have had their hands in the game wherever his memory is darkened or his immortal deed belittled. But in the matter in question there is nothing to be done. We cannot now change America into Columbia; it remains America, and there is a certain dark humour about the fact, quite in accordance with the spirit and career of its discoverer, that as a result of a misunderstanding and the mean intrigues of petty people, the continent sails, as it were, under a false flag.

In that interview, I picture the Admiral as calling Vespucci to account, pointing out the meanness and selfishness of such a proceeding, and asking him why he had not at least curbed the excessive zeal of his friends. "Do you not know," he would have said, "that I was long before you in the land of Paria and that long before you I set foot in Brazil?" Or did he listen to him in silence, in his usual cowardly dread of his fellow men, and with his usual disdain for them, content himself with a sigh or two in secret? Their talk must surely have turned to the new continent, and then the Admiral must certainly have burst out, and his eyes have burned with fanatic flame. A new continent? For him there was no new continent. He did not recognise it. For him there was Zipangu, the lands of Mangi and Cathaja, and the continent of Asia. That is where he had been, and there, without doubt, he had landed, and only a little, a very little more

time, a little patience, a little favour from Fate, a little better health, and he would have found the passage to the Ganges lands. Had not his men in Cuba sworn a sacred oath that the land which they had trodden was the Asiatic coast? The protocols existed in the Royal Chancery, they could be examined at any time. I can see the old explorer's haggard El Greco face, tanned by a thousand tempests, quivering with passion; the faded grey of his dead eyes kindling once more with the old prophetic glow, as he explained the guiding idea of his life to this upstart pilot whose discoveries had been an accident of fortune, and with trembling forefinger showed him on the map that all the Indian archipelago from Guanahani to Trinidad, from Janahica to the land of Veragua, was but the approach to the Great Cham's mighty empire, of which Cuba, where he had landed, was merely an outlying province thrust out into the sea. There was no such place as America; America existed only in his imagination, it was a deception of the Devil.

Amerigo Vespucci bows his head in silence. He is amazed. The year is 1505, no longer 1492: and in the meantime humanity has acquired undreamed-of knowledge. Where has the Admiral been in the interval? In what regions of the spirit has he been wandering? The world of experience has widened. Toscanelli's reckonings have long been superseded. The cosmographies of the previous century have

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

After an engraving by T. Johnson from the Lotto portrait, owned by James W. Ellsworth of Chicago

been changed. The number of degrees of longitude which they adopted as a basis were not conformable to the earth's circumference, and the mistake has been found and corrected. Four years before, the great Leonardo had demonstrated that the " Indian " hypothesis was false: and it followed that America existed. It must exist, for Asia lay thousands of sea miles farther on. That was a mathematical calculation that allowed of no debate.

But Vespucci did not advance these arguments. He was a man of the world, he knew what was fitting in the presence of this Nestor of seafaring craft, he bowed his head before this subduer of the ocean, and he was proud to be his fellow countryman. He felt a reverence for the man himself, and admiration for his mighty deeds: that worn brow and wrecked body moved him to compassion, and, after all, there was something in that tremendous and staggering error that inspired him with awe. Perhaps a man must die in such an error when he has truly lived in it: error was the motive power of that career. Don Quixote is stronger than Sancho Panza. Perhaps " the Empire of the Great Cham " is, in the end, more real than America.

A year later. His life is fading into the flickering silence of a shadow play. At the end of February the king permitted him to come to Court on a mule

instead of a horse, a privilege that was very seldom bestowed, but it was not until three months later that he was able to set out. When he reached Segovia, the king had already gone to Leon. Columbus went via Salamanca to Valladolid, where he at last met the king. Such wanderings were only too familiar. All his life had been spent in wandering; as it had begun, so must it end. Unheeded, muffled in a brown cloak, bent by age and sickness, accompanied only by his brother Bartholomé, whose unshakable loyalty here enters the domain of tragedy, and one solitary servant, he made his way into the town. The king kept him waiting a whole day before he received him. "I am indeed as wretched as I say: hitherto I have only wept over others—may Heaven vouchsafe that men may weep over me." This quotation from the so-called *lettera rarissima* is the expression of his state of mind during this entire time.

The king refused to give a decision on any of Columbus' complaints or requests. He smiled at the Admiral, overwhelmed him with eulogies, protested that he fully recognised the greatness of his services, promised an investigation and an impartial enquiry: and there the matter stayed. The mere suggestion of reinstatement in his offices and dignities was met with icy astonishment. A case was stated, and a tribunal summoned to deal with it, that bore the singular name of "*Junta de descargos*"—"Council for disburdening the con-

sciences ''—of the king and the dead queen. What lay behind it was the sudden objection of Ferdinand that Colón had received his privileges from the departed Isabella, and that he personally, although he had set his name to the agreements, was not responsible for their fulfilment.

Pitiable chicanery. Through all this web of humiliating negotiations, simulated concessions, obstruction, and pedantic justice-mongering, Ferdinand's character stands boldly out in its abysmal falsity. If he thought the obligation laid upon him was too far-reaching, as indeed it was, unreasonable and impossible of fulfilment, as it also was, he could have found some way to give the Admiral a semblance of satisfaction, or at any rate to ease his mind: he need not have let him stand about in the royal anteroom like a beggar, or suffer humiliation in his chanceries, and be treated, as he had been fifteen years before, as a nuisance and a laughing-stock. It would have cost but little,—less perhaps than he was forced to pay later on. And these fifteen years, thanks to this very man, had meant a dynastic, political, and commercial impulse of such force and intensity as was almost unexampled in the history of humanity.

The Admiral had no longer the physical strength to cope with the courtly and pedantic game of intrigue. He had only one faint hope—the arrival of Philip of Austria with his wife, Isabella's

daughter. He had indeed been told of Donna Joanna's condition, and that her year-long melancholia already showed all the symptoms of madness. What could be expected of her: or from the light-minded and pleasure-loving Hapsburger? However, he wanted to go to meet the new royal pair, but a sudden attack of gout on the way forced him to take refuge on the first bed that offered, and he charged his brother Bartholomé in his stead to kiss the hands of Philip and his young wife. The letter that he gave him to deliver closed with the following words: "Your Highnesses may be assured that however severe my torments may be at the moment, I shall soon be in a position to offer you such service as the world has hitherto not seen."

Was it his imminent end that stung him to such hollow promises, and darkened his mind so that he could not even recognise the reality of the fact of death. When he felt his last hour was near, he sent for a notary and witnesses, intending to cancel the will of 1498 and draw up another. It begins with the Don-Quixote dictum: "As I am making a free gift of India to the King and the Queen. . . ." He continues in the same style: it is the same fanfaronade, the same pompous grandiosity, the same extravagance, with which he had in former days dumbfounded the Prior of La Rabida. He was now addressing posterity: and posterity did the best thing it could do in the circumstances: it

buried his words in silence and only kept his name and his deed in remembrance.

On May 19 he gave his last instructions, and on May 20, the eve of Ascension Day, he died. Perhaps there were never wearier eyes than his when he closed them for ever.

The restlessness that had been the fate of the living man pursued him relentlessly after his death. He was first laid in the crypt of the Franciscan monastery at Valladolid. Four years later his son Diego brought his body to the Carthusian monastery of Santa Maria de la Cuevas near Seville. After Diego's death his widow asked permission from the Emperor Charles V to lay the remains of the first Admiral, as his wish had been, in Española. In the year 1673 an earthquake destroyed the Cathedral of San Domingo, and the bones of Columbus were mingled with those from other graves; but they were carefully collected and again buried. When the island fell to France in 1745, the Spanish Admiral d'Artebazel had the vault opened, the skeleton taken out, in spite of its doubtful identity, and conveyed to the Cathedral of Havana.

It seemed as though he would never reach the end of his struggle with fate: as though in the grave he must yearn for his India, his beloved Española, and there, as a shade and a skeleton, set his face against

the manifest existence of America, that gave the lie to his high dream of Paradise and the fabled empire of the Great Cham.

His fame is a collection of fragments: put them together carefully, and suddenly a spirit soars upward who looks at us with friendly eyes.

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